THE RUSSIAN THEATRE

OLIVER M. SAYLER

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THE RUSSIAN THEATRE

From Kenneth Macgowan's "The Theatre of Tomorrow"—Boni and Liveright

ALEXANDER BENOIS' DESIGN FOR THE SETTING OF THE THIRD ACT OF "PETRUSHKA," PEAK OF THE DIAGILEFF REPERTORY AND OF THE ENTIRE RUSSIAN BALLET, WITH SCORE BY STRAVINSKY

The Russian Theatre

By

Oliver M. Sayler

Author of "Russia White or Red," etc.

With Illustrations

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TO

My Mother

WHO SPED ME COURAGEOUSLY

ON MY ADVENTURE

INTRODUCTION

In writing about the theatre nothing today is more appropriate than the explanation of Russian art. That art, carried far by enthusiasm and noble standards, is happily better known to us than it was. The American mind, let us trust, becomes every year more worthy to receive it.

If there is in our country a critic as fitted as Mr. Sayler to discuss this art, I know him not. The book that follows is informed, its spirit moves ever on a high level, its judgments seem to me unvaryingly correct, and the ripe simplicity of the style is a suitable vehicle for the message.

The book is worthy to present to our people the most energetic and intense stage that, in over a century, mankind has anywhere produced.

NORMAN HAPGOOD

PREFACE

to

THE SECOND EDITION

With the exhaustion of the First Edition of this work and the necessity for a new printing to meet the continuing and steadily increasing demand for information concerning a theatre which looms ever larger on our own stage, I am faced by three alternatives: either to go to press again in the original form, or to prepare an entirely new manuscript, or to amplify the original in such a way as to bring it up to date and establish contact between it and a situation which has brought the Russian theatre emphatically into the foreground of our dramatic vision.

The first course would have dodged patent responsibilities; the second would have entailed useless rewording of a story which in outline, detail and interpretation still stands as true today as when it was written. I have, therefore, adopted the third plan. Leaving the original record untouched as the only thorough chronicle in English of the foremost dramatic movement of our time, gathered under vivid and picturesque conditions, I have added to it an exhaustive survey of the events and phenomena of Russian stages

during the last four years, an analysis and interpretation of those activities, a resume not only of the current Russian invasion of our theatre but of the backgrounds and antecedents of that invasion, and finally a word on the spirit underlying this entire movement especially as it appears in the guise of preceptor to our own dramatic renaissance.

If in its modest way the First Edition of this work was instrumental in stimulating American curiosity concerning the Russian theatre and in making smooth by anticipatory interpretation the path of its advent in force on our stage, perhaps the present reissue in revised and enlarged form will encounter a public opinion that has learned to distinguish between the eternal and the ephemeral aspects of the Russian scene and will serve even more fully to establish that permanent contact between the dramatic activities of the two countries which is essential to the richest fruition of both our own theatre and the Russian.

Convinced by experience that I was justified in rejecting current usage in many cases in the spelling of Russian proper names, I have retained throughout the style adopted in the original text. Transliterations arriving roundabout by way of French and German lead to inaccuracies of pronunciation in English. I have found that the literal indication of the Russian pronunciation, independent of arbitrary rules and as simply and accurately in each case as our alphabet will permit, greatly obviates the terrors of terminol-

ogy. I have accepted custom, however, in utilizing *Chauve-Souris,* the French title of Balieff's *Letutchaya Muish* which has been retained as well in America, wherever I refer to the reincarnation of The Bat of Moscow outside Russian boundaries. In every case, I have brought Russian dates into conformity with our own calendar.

In giving the new edition a more appropriate format and richer illustrative value, I have assumed obligations which deserve acknowledgment here. The insignia on the cover, combining the devices of three of the most important Russian theatres, and the design for the end papers are the work of Lucie R. Sayler. For the use of the color plates of the frontispiece, Benois's "Petrushka"; and of Roerich's "Prince Igor," I am indebted to Kenneth Macgowan, author of "The Theatre of Tomorrow," and his publishers, Boni and Liveright. The other color plates as well as that used on the jacket are the loan of Nikita Balieff, Morris Gest and Balieff's artists, Sergei Sudeykin and Nicolas Remisoff. Numerous half tone engravings have been added to the new edition through the kindness of *Theatre Arts Magazine.*

I am glad once more to express my gratitude to the editors of *The Bookman, Vanity Fair,* the *Boston Evening Transcript* and *The Indianapolis News* for permission to reprint portions of the material in this volume.

Nor can I refrain from mentioning again the eager

and enthusiastic assistance of Giorgi and Andrei Weber, elder sons of my Moscow host and interpreters to me of their country's speech, impulse and imagination. On the threshold of brilliant careers, they had both fallen fatal victims of social strife on battlefield and aboard ship within two years after I bade them farewell. And finally, my debt to the artists of the Russian theatre themselves for aid in gathering the record of their labors is too great to estimate. To them, I assign whatever credit inheres in the arrival of this work at its Second Edition.

OLIVER M. SAYLER

New York City,
October, 1922

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THE RUSSIAN THEATRE

CHAPTER I

Plays Within a Play

It wasn't a promising prospect for a winter of calm consideration of the Russian theatre, as I sat one morning in November, 1917, in the Yaroslavl station in Moscow on the bench which had been my couch the preceding night. Down by the Kremlin the big guns had been booming ever since my journey across Siberia had come to an end the previous afternoon. Out on the street in front of the station the rattle of small arms rose and fell with all the realism of a well-staged western melodrama. Evidently I was to have my fill of drama in the raw and out-of-doors if not within the confines of Aristotle and the four walls of a theatre.

Somewhat in the spirit of the defeated candidate who buys the cold gray newspapers the dawn of the morning after election, I had counted out my postage-stamp kopecks at the station news stand in payment for the latest copies of *The Theatrical Gazette* and *The Theatre and Art,* weekly journalistic records re-

spectively of the stages of Moscow and Petrograd. It didn't help much to turn the pages and figure out what plays I could have seen if the Bolsheviki hadn't been so prompt in starting their revolution. I could have heard Shaliapin sing in Petrograd. I could have seen "The Blue Bird" and "The Cherry Orchard" and "The Village Stepantchikovo", a play made from untranslated Dostoievsky, at the Moscow Art Theatre. I could have seen Oscar Wilde's "Salome" in cubist dress at the Kamerny. I could have seen Mordkin dance at the Theatre of the Soviet of Workmen's Deputies. But the Soviet had decided to produce an impromptu pageant of its own in the streets of Moscow. And the Soviet brooks no competition!

I had only myself to blame if I was not satisfied with my lot. There was no evidence in distant America that the Russian theatre had survived three years of war and six months of half-revolution. It had not survived significantly in orderly England or in sobered France or even in neutral New York. With us and with the western Europeans, war revealed our theatre only too clearly as a luxury, a pastime and an industry. But I thought I knew the Russians and the fundamental demand of the Russian spirit for artistic expression. I knew from the testimony of Gordon Craig and others that Moscow and Petrograd had carried the modern theatre to its finest achievement. And I feared that no achievement, however fundamental, could survive indefinitely the cataclysm of the social revolution which from the start hung ominously

in the offing of the political revolution. If I wished to snatch a brand from the ashes, I must go and go at once. Yet, with all this faith, there were times on the long journey the wrong way round the world when I mistrusted my mission. After I had confided it to a few fellow travelers and had wilted under their dubious gaze, I decided to keep my own counsel and conserve my confidence.

Reassurance came after I had burned my bridges behind me. "The Russian theatres? Certainly they are running," said my cabin companion on the bob-tailed little Japanese craft which carried me from Tsuruga to Vladivostok. He was a Russian engineer, homeward bound. "You may be disappointed in them," he said, with the self-abasement of the Slav. "Stanislavsky has carried realism to its pole at the Art Theatre in Moscow, and Meyerhold has developed theatricality to the opposite extreme in Petrograd, and neither has created anything really new in the theatre." Still, to perfect the old was something, and, besides, what the theatre needs is not so much something new as a rediscovery of the old.

During a bloody week of violent civil strife and another week of nervous uncertainty after Kerensky's forces in the Kremlin had capitulated, the prospect of studying the Russian theatre was dark enough. There were other problems to solve, such as the question of a roof and sustenance, but each day I watched the hoardings and the bulletin boards on the doors of the Art Theatre for an announcement of reopening. Life

began to resume the normal. The newspapers reappeared. Two or three of the tram lines were repaired and started running. Here and there a telephone stirred from sleep. And the *izvoshchiks* slunk back into the city with their droshkies from their hiding places in the country. Just two weeks after my arrival, the directors of the Kamerny ventured to unlock the doors to this curious and intriguing haunt of the futurists and kindred experimenters. And I started my Russian theatregoing with the cubist "Salome" about which I had read that first morning in the station.

Mystery and silence still shrouded the Art Theatre. Should it persist or should it yield? Counsels were divided. Without it, my survey would be as incomplete as a Russian meal without a samovar. Finally on Thanksgiving Day I found the office inhabited and presented my letters of introduction from Maurice Browne and others to Stanislavsky, first artist of the theatre, and to Nyemirovitch-Dantchenko, whose funds and facility in finding others made the Art Theatre a substantial institution even in its early days of struggle. Neither was in the building. But the season would be resumed the following Tuesday. The repertory had just been completed. Would I care to come to "The Blue Bird" in the afternoon or to Tchehoff's "The Three Sisters" in the evening? Both? I must be very American, indeed, to go to the theatre twice in the same day. The next evening I probably wouldn't care to see "The Village Stepantchikovo." It was obscure and very Russian. Perhaps later in the winter.

FAÇADE OF THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE IN KAMERGERSKY PEREULOK

Photographs by the Author

THE SMALL STATE THEATRE, MOSCOW, HOME OF THE CLASSIC DRAMA

Photograph by the Author

THE ALEXANDRINSKY THEATRE, PETROGRAD, WITH THE MONUMENT TO CATHERINE II IN THE FOREGROUND

Nor "The Lower Depths" of Gorky the following Sunday afternoon. Stanislavsky would not play his rôle of Satine. But he would on toward the holidays. "The Cherry Orchard" of Tchehoff that evening, if I liked. He would be in the cast then. And so it went through another hour or two of the most gracious attention, while I should have been scouting for the ghost of a Thanksgiving dinner in the restaurants of Moscow. But the day had justified its name!

To sketch sharply the astonishing picture of the Russian theatre under the Revolution, I know of no better way than to tabulate the range of choice in the repertory of the Moscow theatres that first day after their enforced vacation: At the Art Theatre, "The Blue Bird" and "The Three Sisters." At the Great State Theatre, the home of the opera and the ballet, "Aida." At the Small State Theatre, the home of the classic drama, Griboyedoff's *"Gore ot Uma"*, a title which defies translation but which I like to paraphrase as "The Sorrows of the Spirit." At the Kamerny, a passionate tragedy of the Persian hinterland, "The Azure Carpet" by Liuboff Stolitsa. At Kommissarzhevsky's Theatre, "The Comedy of Alexei" by Kuzmin and "Requiem" by Andreieff. At the Theatre of the Soviet of Workmen's Deputies, once the Zimina Opera, "La Bohème" and Taneyeff's "Orestes." At the Theatre Korsha, Tolstoy's terrifying picture of the Russian peasant, "The Power of Darkness." At the Moscow Dramatic Theatre, Merezhkovsky's "Paul I." And at the super-variety of Balieff, *Letutchaya Muish*

or The Bat, Gogol's "Ivan Ivanovitch and Ivan Nikiforovitch" among many other sketches and interludes.

This, it might be supposed, was a holiday repertory, a thank offering for the return of civil peace if not in honor of the proletarian victors. Not so. Any day throughout the rest of the winter, except on the religious holidays when all the theatres and shops were closed, a similar range of choice was possible. Sometimes the titles were not so familiar to a foreigner, sometimes more so. For Shakespeare and Dickens and Wilde as well as the better known Russian playwrights were freely represented. On through the great demonstrations for and against the Government, on through the days of the German advance and the Peace Congress, the theatre held to its course, — the most normal of all the Russian institutions, the only one to reflect any of the glory of the elder days. On it went, undisturbed, through pillage and murder and anarchy. From November to March, in the course of eighty-seven visits to the Russian theatre, I never went home after the final curtain a single night in either Moscow or Petrograd without hearing firing across the city or just around the corner. Late in January while the snow in Theatre Place two blocks away was stained scarlet with blood, I sat in the Art Theatre. The play was Gorky's "The Lower Depths." All the great ones, Stanislavsky and Katchaloff and the rest, were in the cast. The performance was the most terribly moving of my whole winter in the Russian theatre. Along with the other hundreds in that crowded playhouse,

my body was torn with hunger and my soul flayed with sickness and pity and despair. Yet there we sat, willingly, eagerly, plunging the knife of spiritual torture still deeper in the wound.

Sometimes I think that is the surest explanation why the Russian theatre has persisted through the days of anxiety and the Terror. Out of their sorrows the Russians have builded all their art. And in the days of their profoundest gloom, they return to it for the consolation which nothing else affords.

To the Russian, the theatre is not a refuge for idle amusement. Even in the piping times before the war —and what a life it must have been then in Moscow! —the typical form of lighter mummery had the thrust of intellect and the stimulus of wit to lift it from animal inanity. Balieff, at *Letutchaya Muish,* poked his addled smile and then his pudgy body through the curtains between the numbers of his variety programme, and for five or fifteen minutes sparred with any one who dared risk the game in lightning flashes of give and take. Balieff still sparred after the Revolution, although most of his imitators straggled on the edge of failure and one by one closed their doors. Even he has had to fight against insuperable odds. It is not easy to smile and play with words while the world is toppling.

The Russian theatre has persisted, therefore, not because it is a relief from life, an underground retreat where one could escape the agonies and the duties and the burdens of life. To the Russian, the theatre is

rather a microcosmos, a concentration and an explanation of life. If life can not be explained, at least its inexplicability can be faced. And that way lies resignation and peace for a time.

And so it is that the sober stages — the Art Theatre, the Opera and the Ballet, the Small State Theatre with its classic repertory — have survived the tribulations of social chaos while the lighter and the experimental theatres have found the struggle almost hopeless. Seats are sold out at the Art Theatre days in advance. In fact, you have to stand in line for a number and then return to find out whether yours has been drawn as one of the lucky numbers entitling the holder to buy seats. Tickets to the masterpieces of Tchaikovsky and Glinka at the Great State Theatre bring prices under the canopy just before the curtain that would make speculators in Caruso coupons envious. Just ahead may lie the complete break-up of life and of this last remnant of the elder life. But while it endures, the Russian is determined to drink deep of its spiritual draught.

Day by day against forbidding odds I gathered together the fragments of this strange panorama of plays within the vaster play of the Revolution. My own problem was to stick to my task, although the mad drama of the headlong course of human events beckoned me to drop my tools and sit spellbound, watching the three and thirty rings of its sardonic circus. Never, however, was this vaster spectacle quite out of my range of vision. The problem of food and shelter and comparative safety linked me intimately with its

grim aspects. Always it crept unbidden into the foreground, coloring and heightening and illuminating the particular phase of the scene I had set myself to study.

Far more distracting than this temptation was the dilatory nature of the Russian. When he starts on a task there is no one in the world more intense than the Muscovite. He burns himself up at it. Nothing else exists for him until it is finished. Once it is done, though, he is not interested in preserving the record or in recalling it from the past. The doors of every theatre in Russia opened wide for me when my errand became known. Again and again I presented myself at the Art Theatre five minutes before the curtain. And although the house had been sold out for days, a seat was found for me. But when I asked for the facts, the records of the past, the prospects for the future, the photographs with which to illustrate my experiences, I was politely put off until to-morrow. And with the Russian as with the Mexican, to-morrow never becomes to-day. Perhaps it was this almost insuperable obstacle which led one of our American critics to declare, while a correspondent in Russia, that the task of gathering the record of the Russian theatre was a hopeless one. It was not hopeless, perhaps, but it was far from hopeful. No Russian, so far as I could discover, has ever tried to surmount its difficulties.

The calendar of my disappointments looms large in my journal. Day after day I dogged the trail of Tairoff and Forterre, Stanislavsky and Kommissarzhevsky

and Sumbatoff. I begged and I pleaded. One night at the Kamerny I feigned anger and the ruse nearly succeeded. There was a hurried consultation and Tairoff rushed up, caught me in his arms and smiled, — and promised once more. Little by little I gathered my data, sometimes, I think, without their realizing it. If it had been a lesser record, I would have given up in despair long before it was finished.

From November, 1917, until February, 1918, Moscow held me in its fascinating grip. Each week when I thought I had completed the repertory of the leading theatres, new plays were thrust into the schedules from inexhaustible storehouses. There have been few new productions in the Russian theatres since the Revolution. The cost has been forbidding under the straitened circumstances. And so the best of the old has been drawn forth to keep the programmes full.

At last in February I tore myself away for a desperate trip to Petrograd in the face of the German advance. The embassies were packed to leave. I was advised to take the next train out myself. " But I have just arrived," I protested. Meyerhold, the eager *régisseur* of the Alexandrinsky Theatre, and good gray Golovin, the artist who paints his scenery, saw my point, urged me to stay, and promised to keep me in hiding for two years if necessary, in case the Germans should come!

With the exception of the Alexandrinsky and the Marinsky, the two state-endowed homes of the drama and the opera, and one or two experimental theatres

such as Yevreynoff's Crooked Looking-Glass, the stages of the capital were never so important as those of Moscow. And even these had suffered from the strictures of revolution more seriously than the Moscow theatres, just as every phase of life in Petrograd was more bitter and desperate than in Moscow. Still, the spirit was the same. Witness, for instance, the list from which I had to choose the night in February before the embassies fled for the morasses of Finland or the salubrious peace of Vologda:

At the Marinsky, Rimsky-Korsakoff's opera, "*Snyegurotchka.*" At the Alexandrinsky, one of the masterpieces of Ostrovsky, "The Thunderstorm." At the Mihailovsky, Euripides' "Hippolyte," with scenery by Bakst. At the Narodny Dom, the huge auditorium where opera is given at nominal prices, "Yevgeny Onyegin", the masterpiece of Tchaikovsky and Pushkin. In the Dramatic Hall of the Narodny Dom, "The Days of Our Life", one of the earlier plays of Andreieff. At the Workers' Theatre, another play by Andreieff, "Savva." At the Crooked Looking-Glass, Schnitzler's "The Merry-go-round." At the Musical Drama, "Carmen." At the Theatre Saburova, Maurice Donnay's "The Education of a Prince." At the Liteiny, Ibsen's "Ghosts." At the Theatre Nezlobina, Merezhkovsky's "Paul I." And at the Workshop Theatre, Maeterlinck's "The Miracle of St. Anthony."

A remarkable repertory for the theatres of a city of order and peace. But for Petrograd! Players and audience alike, hungry and harassed by the Terror.

And the Germans a few hours' railroad journey distant and still surging onward. It was incredible!

Amazing as it was, Petrograd was not the place to study the Russian theatre. It lacked the detachment, the aloofness of Moscow. The air of intense uncertainty made life too dynamic for contemplation. Besides, I had considerable material to gather together in Moscow and gaps in my records to fill, and so after two weeks I returned to the city of the Kremlin. Another fortnight there, and I was ready to start on the long trail home. The theatres had practically completed their season. There would be performances in alternating weeks through Lent, but no new productions or revivals. The way out was becoming more difficult daily. Finland was closed and Vladivostok was several times as far distant as it had been in the previous autumn. To bring back my records in safety was worth more than another glimpse or two of the defiantly beautiful theatre of Russia, kept alive by the dauntless courage of her artists.

When I hark back to the memories of that theatre and then consider the state of our own in wartime and after, safe and snug and trivial, across the world from the firing line and the social maelstrom, I am in no mood to make excuses for the Russian. His State is on the rocks through the fault of — well, who shall say whose was the fault? At any rate, though Russia has lost her patrimony for awhile, she has not lost her soul!

CHAPTER II

The World's First Theatre

Constantin Sergeievitch Alexeieff reached out a large warm hand and his furrowed face broke into a cordial smile, as my Moscow host, himself a man of fine tastes and keen pride in the Russian theatre, started to introduce me in the little dressing room to the rear of the stage of the Art Theatre. My letters had preceded me, — letters telling how I had come all the way from America into the shadow of the Terror just to sit in the playhouses of Moscow and Petrograd and carry back to my own country a brand of inspiration from their defiant beauty. As the name in the letters and the name from the lips of my host flashed their identity across the mind of the artist, I felt the thrill of suddenly increased pressure on my hand, the smile vanished from his face and tears came into his eyes. For seventeen thousand miles I had persisted on my errand, relying on my own faith, a blind faith which I could hardly analyze. Now I was face to face with an answering faith. I knew why I had come, and the knowledge of my responsibility almost overwhelmed me.

It was thus that I met Stanislavsky, president of the

council and first artist of the world's first theatre. Alexeieff he is in life, but all Russia and the world know him by his stage name, Stanislavsky. All Russia knows him, and his name and his influence are written all over the record of the Russian theatre of the last two decades.

Under the iron-gray soldierly guise of Vershinin, the reserved but sensitive lieutenant colonel in Tchehoff's " The Three Sisters ", I first saw him that evening of the day the theatre reopened after the Bolshevik Revolution. In the afternoon " The Blue Bird " had cast its spell over me and I had yielded to Stanislavsky, producer, — the master artist of the active modern theatre. Maeterlinck's *féerie* had stood forth for the first time as its creator had intended, simply but richly, without the sentimental trappings of the western productions. Now it was Stanislavsky, actor, to whom I had surrendered, an actor distinguished for poise, for subtlety of shadings and for keenness of intellect, but above all for the beauty of his spirit.

Five days later I visited him again in his dressing room to discuss my plans, and this time I sat in the presence of the genial, easy-going, middle-aged Gaieff of Tchehoff's " The Cherry Orchard." The call bell rang before we had finished and so I returned after the final curtain. At the mirror sat a man with silver hair. I must be in the wrong room! By this time my host had caught up with me at the door and turned me back into the room, — to face Stanislavsky after

all, Stanislavsky the man. At the age of fifty-five his hair is white. But that is the only sign of years. His huge square frame is vigorous and alert, his eye keen and kindly, his grasp of detail and his capacity for work thoroughly un-Russian. I believe he is the busiest man in Moscow, not excepting even the tireless People's *Kommissars*. At least, he is the hardest man in the city to find. Not so hard, though, if you are as persistent in your task as he is in his! But in spite of this refusal to "let down" like the majority of his countrymen and most foreigners who live long in Russia, Stanislavsky is splendidly Russian. I don't know why I had expected to find in him more of the man of the world, speaking English, perhaps, and surely French fluently and possessed of the confidence and authority to which his position entitled him. I don't know, unless it is because for so long he and he alone has personified outside of Russia the world's first theatre. On the contrary, he speaks with difficulty when he leaves his native tongue. His heart and soul are in Russia and in his work. Transplant him, as you could a man of the world, and he would perish. Most of all is he Russian in the gentleness and simplicity of his ways, in the beauty of spirit which inheres alike in the artist and the man.

Once more I saw him in his dressing room, this time as Satine, the strange groping soul in Maxim Gorky's masterpiece, "The Lower Depths", who, stung by the tragedies of that dim underworld, rises from his planks and flings out a flaming declaration

of his belief in life. In this face none of the quiet dignity of Vershinin, none of the placid sensitiveness of Gaieff. Instead, the smouldering terror of the lost soul who refuses to admit that he is lost, the defiant glint of the eye, the nervous twitching of the mouth standing out from the frame of tattered beard and hair. I could not avoid the feeling that here was Satine himself, the Satine I had seen from my seat in the auditorium, although this Satine was telling me what I should see in the Studio playhouses of the Art Theatre and was calling in the young men in charge of them to introduce them to me. Such is the persuasive mastery of the craft of make-up which the Russian has achieved. At the Art Theatre, this natural gift is applied with even more startling exactness than in the other playhouses of Moscow, for the practical absence of footlights permits the actors to dispense with all exaggeration and assume the semblance of life.

Several other times I met Constantin Sergeitch, in the theatre or at the Studios, those lusty children of the parent institution which will keep it always young and which their founder loves, I am sure, even more fondly than the Art Theatre itself. Toward the end of the winter he was seriously ill, and I continued my research through Vladimir Ivanovitch Nyemirovitch-Dantchenko, the business brains of the Art Theatre; Rumiantseff, the house manager; Berthenson, the new stage manager from the Alexandrinsky in Petrograd, and Lazarieff, a gracious member of the company

entrusted to me as a kind of diplomatic plenipotentiary. Still, it is Stanislavsky who personifies the Moscow Art Theatre to me. I like most to remember him as I saw him the afternoon of the dress rehearsal of "Twelfth Night" at the First Studio. Here were his pupils, his children, ready to reveal the product of their patient labors to their master and to the assembled pillars of the Moscow stage. All of the pillars were there — hale and hearty Prince Sumbatoff, regent of the Small State Theatre, the home of classic drama; Pravdin, his most distinguished actor; Anderson, the bewitching blonde inheritor of Pavlova's laurels in the ballet; Gzovskaya, once of the Art Theatre and at that time in Sumbatoff's ranks, and many others. On the front row of the tiny improvised auditorium, a seat or two to my right, sat Stanislavsky with pencil and paper in hand to note the transgressions of his flock. These implements, though, were soon forgotten and a broad smile of pride mingled with unaffected and unashamed pleasure spread over his face as these eager candidates for the Art Theatre ranks romped their way through the heartiest, the most truly Elizabethan performance of "Twelfth Night" I have ever seen.

Stanislavsky and Nyemirovitch-Dantchenko; the eighteen-hour session between the actor and the business man in a Moscow café on June 4, 1897, when the foundations of the theatre were agreed upon; the endlessly patient preparation of its productions; Tchehoff and his plays, "The Sea Gull" and "The Three Sis-

ters" and "The Cherry Orchard" — these are the facts and the personalities by which the Moscow Art Theatre is known in America. They are salient facts but they are not the only facts, and it may be well both for us and for Russia to know a few more of the facts about this first of the world's theatres.

You would never suspect the intentions of the interior of the Art Theatre from its businesslike façade in Kamergersky Pereulok, a little over two squares from the great open Theatre Place of Moscow. Once it was a business block, and shops still occupy the street-floor front. Inside, however, its architectural ancestry is soon forgotten, for the transformation has been thorough. The Art Theatre has one of the most satisfactory auditoriums of the world's playhouses, — a severe but comfortable and quiet enclosure in browns, with wood panelling in place of the traditional stucco and with three floors, each opening by way of spacious corridors into tempting foyers and restaurant and smoking and trophy rooms. Beyond the public gaze, however, there is a pitiful lack of elbow space. The costume accumulations of twenty years are stowed in two small rooms up under the roof. The scenery has overflowed into all the vacant buildings and lofts opening on the great courtyard at the rear of the theatre. The dilapidated stagecoach used in the first act of the Dostoievsky play, "The Village Stepantchikovo", is pitched out anywhere in this courtyard between performances, and it is becoming more realistic every week! The Art Theatre is looking forward to a new

building some day, — the world's first playhouse for the world's first theatre. But there will have to be a new Russia before the Art Theatre has a new home!

How a sober, serious institution such as this has been able to survive the strain of three years of war and nearly two years of profound social upheaval is a mystery explicable only by an understanding of Russian character. In the previous chapter I have explained the dogged persistence of art, and the theatre in particular, by the fact that the Russian has built his deepest feelings into his art, and to these purging experiences he returns when life becomes too heavy to endure. The ability of the Moscow Art Theatre to preserve the astonishing perfection of its former days under almost insuperable handicaps is due also to its marvelously efficient and compact organization.

The Art Theatre is an institution. It has its own home, its own company, its own clientele, its own faithfully built past, its own carefully analyzed future. Each year it has a budget which faces facts as relentlessly as the budget of a bank or an insurance corporation. It knows by experience that as long as the citizens of Moscow walk that city's cobble streets they will buy all of the tickets offered for sale at its box office. The only error in its calculations during the winter of 1917–1918 lay in the deficit due to the closing of the theatre during the Bolshevik Revolution. The theatre is incorporated as a coöperative body after the manner of corporate institutions throughout the world. Every one connected

with the theatre draws his individual salary, whether he is a member of the coöperative society or not. The purpose of that society is to apply the profits and other sums which may be received, first of all to the upbuilding of the theatre as a permanent institution, and afterwards to the members in proportion to their stock holdings and their salaries. The opportunity to share in the management of the institution into which they have poured their lives and also in its financial returns has induced most of the leading members of the company to join the corporation. Loyalty and affection for Stanislavsky binds every one connected with the theatre to his work, but the coöperative organization makes that loyalty intensely practical. Whenever I came back to its brown curtains with the sea-gull device worked on them, after I had made a round of the other playhouses of Moscow, I felt ashamed for doubting its preëminence. There was no authority or order at the Great State Theatre, the home of opera and ballet. There was utter disorder and confusion at the Theatre of the Soviet of Workmen's Deputies. But at the Art Theatre every one ticked out his tasks like the wheels of a great clock. Often there was more than one at hand to meet emergencies as they arose.

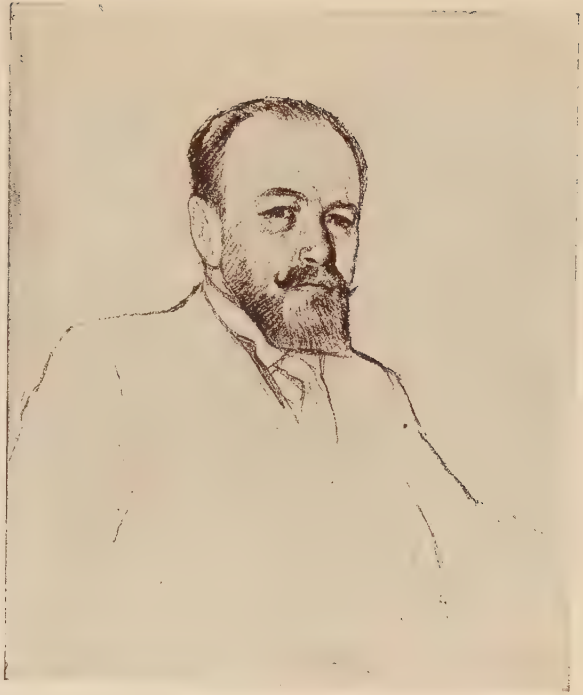
Under the charter, the operation of the theatre is divided between the Council and the Direction. The Council decides what plays shall be produced, who shall design the scenery, who shall write the necessary music, who shall supervise the production and who shall play the various rôles. Its tasks lie behind the

curtain. Stanislavsky, of course, is at its head, and its other members include many of the ablest actors in the company: Gribunin, Katchaloff, Massalitinoff, Moskvin, Stahovitch, Sushkyevitch and Gaidaroff.

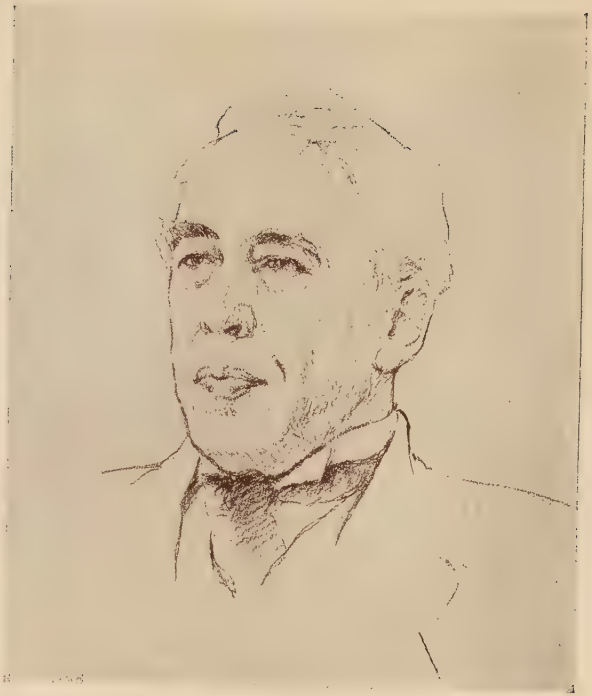
The Direction, on the other hand, engages itself to carry out the behests of the Council. It undertakes and meets the financial and the business obligations of the theatre and at its head is Moscow's Maecenas, Vladimir Ivanovitch Nyemirovitch-Dantchenko, who is assisted by Alexandroff and the manager of the house, Rumiantseff. From the first hours of the Art Theatre, Vladimir Ivanovitch has stood by the side of Stanislavsky, helping by shrewd practical advice and by lavish use of his private fortune to guide the institution to an independent basis. It has been his acute business sense which has carried the Art Theatre safely through the trying days of war and revolution. He, too, is well on toward sixty years, but although his mind and his manner are still almost as young as those of his coadjutor, he carries the air of a man of affairs. If you caught a glimpse of him at Monte Carlo or at Capri, you might mistake him for a Russian Grand Duke traveling incognito to escape a Bolshevik doom.

It is no wonder, then, that the Art Theatre has been able to attract to its ranks and hold many of the foremost actors of the Russian stage. The more important members of the company number at least fifty, while the pupils of the Studio theatres, who are often called to the parent stage to play minor rôles, will double that total. The company is especially strong

in its men. Six of them in addition to Stanislavsky are artists of the first rank. Any one of the seven would be acknowledged leader of our stage if his gifts could be transferred and made intelligible in our theatres. Chief among the men after Stanislavsky is Vassily Ivanovitch Katchaloff, an actor of keen mind, fine imagination and impressive presence, equalled only by Mansfield in his prime or Coquelin. He is as much at home in the rôle of the suave Don Juan in Pushkin's "The Stone Guest" as he is in that of the tattered Baron in Gorky's "The Lower Depths." No one in the Russian theatre can say "If you please" with more urbanity than Katchaloff. It was he who played Hamlet in the much-discussed production of the tragedy for which Gordon Craig designed the scenery in 1912. Equally important in the Art Theatre ensemble is the versatile Ivan Mihailovitch Moskvin, Russia's and, I think, the world's greatest living high comedian. In a season you may see him in rôles ranging all the way from the unctuous match-making country doctor in Turgenieff's "A Month in the Country" to the tragic figure of Tsar Fyodor Ivanovitch in Count Alexei Tolstoy's historical play of the same name. I thought at first that the Russians did not appreciate Moskvin and his subtle, pointed humor. They did not pay audible tribute as we would. But after a while I discovered that they cherished Moskvin as a supreme artist instead of a mere entertainer. Our stage has probably never known a character actor of the breadth and range of Luzhsky. And the



VLADIMIR IVANOVITCH NYEMIROVITCH-DANTCHENKO, PRESIDENT OF THE DIRECTION, MOSCOW ART THEATRE



CONSTANTIN SERGEIEVITCH STANISLAVSKY, FIRST ARTIST AND PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL, MOSCOW ART THEATRE

FROM PENCIL SKETCHES BY A. A. KOIRANSKY

Elizabeth, Moscow

VASSILY IVANOVITCH KATCHALOFF

Saharoff, Moscow

OLGA LEONARDOVNA KNIPPER, WIDOW OF THE PLAYWRIGHT, TCHEHOFF

Saharoff, Moscow

IVAN MIHAILOVITCH MOSKVIN

LEADING PLAYERS OF THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE COMPANY

brusque Gribunin, the sturdy Vishnevsky and the earnest Massalitinoff have only slightly less surprising gifts.

First of the actresses at the Art Theatre is Olga Leonardovna Knipper, widow of the beloved playwright, Anton Tchehoff, who wrote the leading rôles in his plays for her and whom she married four years before his death in 1904. Through her, the Tchehoff tradition lives on unbroken, and when in "The Three Sisters" and "The Cherry Orchard" she appears opposite Stanislavsky, the modern theatre reaches the height of its eloquence and its beauty in the realm of realistic drama. Mme. Knipper is still in her prime and she probably plays the rôle of Liuboff Ranevskaya, owner of the Cherry Orchard, more convincingly than she did in 1904, although as Masha she looks like the eldest instead of the middle of the three sisters. Her scope and her powers are more nearly similar to those of Mrs. Fiske than of any one else in the American theatre.

The Art Theatre is weaker, comparatively, in its women. And yet, besides Mme. Knipper, there are others, many others, gifted and intelligent far beyond our own players: Maria Petrovna Lilina, the wife of Stanislavsky, crisp and penetrating and ingratiating; Nadiezhda Butova, powerful in her reserve; Maria Germanova, stunning and commanding in her dark fascination; and Maria Zhdanova, very young and very promising, charming and wistful and light as a feather in her touch.

To these in time will be added the graduates from the Studio theatres, young players who under the quick sympathy and the rigorous discipline of Stanislavsky are mooring themselves firmly in their art. Occasionally you will hear some one in Moscow ask who will take the place of this player or that in future years, who will play a certain cherished rôle. Possibly no one. Surely no one has been found to follow the mourned Artyom, the inimitable creator of strange old men, who died in the first year of the war. But there will be other plays and other rôles for the younger generation. Already the Studios have cast up the flaming genius of Kolin. Up from the Studios, too, have come the antic Smuishlyaieff; the tender and morose Tchehoff, nephew of the playwright; and the impassioned Baklanova, a wholly new kind of genius for the Art Theatre.

The world's first theatre? By what right? By right of its extraordinary personnel? Partly. By right of its imposing and notable repertory? Partly that, too. In twenty years, four of them years of war and desolation, the Moscow Art Theatre has made sixty-one productions — seventy-one plays in all. Of the sixty-one, Russia has provided the plays for thirty-six of the productions. The entire course of Russian dramatic literature has yielded up its treasures, from Pushkin and Gogol and Griboyedoff and Ostrovsky down through the Tolstoys and Turgenieff and Dostoievsky to Tchehoff and Andreieff and Gorky. With a fine catholicity of taste as well as a loyalty to

her native writers, foreign dramatists were sought for twenty-five of the productions: Sophocles and Shakespeare, Molière and Goldoni, Maeterlinck and Hauptmann, Ibsen and Hamsun. The Russian respect for Ibsen is revealed in the fact that nine of these twenty-five productions were of his plays. Almost the entire acting canon of the great Norwegian, with the exception of "A Doll's House", "The Lady from the Sea" and "John Gabriel Borkman", has been played on the stage of the Art Theatre.

Nothing tells so compactly the story of the Moscow Art Theatre as the growth of its repertory year by year. Plays have often been held over from season to season or revived, but it is the new productions which are significant. Between the lines, too, runs the course of Russian history, with bare spots to mark the Great War and the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917. I present it, therefore, in full, letting its eloquent implications and connotations speak for themselves:

Season of 1898–1899: "Tsar Fyodor Ivanovitch", Count Alexei Tolstoy; "They Who Take the Law into Their Hands", Pisemsky; "The Sunken Bell", Hauptmann; "The Merchant of Venice", Shakespeare; "The Hostess of the Inn" and "The Happiness of Greta", Goldoni; "The Sea Gull", Tchehoff; "Antigone", Sophocles; "Hedda Gabler", Ibsen.

Season of 1899–1900: "The Death of Ivan the Terrible", Count Alexei Tolstoy; "Twelfth Night", Shakespeare; "Drayman Henschel", Hauptmann; "Uncle Vanya", Tchehoff; "Lonely Lives", Hauptmann.

Season of 1900–1901: "The Snow Maiden", Ostrovsky; "An Enemy of the People", Ibsen; "When We Dead Awaken", Ibsen; "The Three Sisters", Tchehoff.

Season of 1901–1902: "The Wild Duck", Ibsen; "In Dream Land", Nyemirovitch-Dantchenko; "Michael Kramer", Hauptmann.

Season of 1902–1903: "Smug Citizens", Gorky; "The Power of Darkness", Count Lyoff Tolstoy; "The Lower Depths", Gorky; "Pillars of Society", Ibsen.

Season of 1903–1904: "Julius Cæsar", Shakespeare; "The Cherry Orchard", Tchehoff.

Season of 1904–1905: Three Short Plays, Maeterlinck; "Ivanoff", Tchehoff; "At the Monastery" and "Miniatures", Yartseff, Tchehoff and Tchirikoff; "The Prodigal Son" and "Ivan Mironitch", Naidenoff; "Ghosts", Ibsen.

Season of 1905–1906: "Children of the Sun", Gorky.

Season of 1906–1907: "The Sorrows of the Spirit", Griboyedoff; "Brand", Ibsen; "The Drama of Life", Hamsun; "The Walls", Naidenoff.

Season of 1907–1908: "Boris Godunoff", Pushkin; "The Life of Man", Andreieff; "Rosmersholm", Ibsen.

Season of 1908–1909: "The Blue Bird", Maeterlinck; "The Inspector General", Gogol; "At the Tsar's Door", Hamsun.

Season of 1909–1910: "Anathema", Andreieff;

"A Month in the Country", Turgenieff; "Enough Stupidity in Every Wise Man", Ostrovsky.

Season of 1910–1911: "The Brothers Karamazoff", Dostoievsky; "Miserere", Youshkyevitch; "In the Claws of Life", Hamsun.

Season of 1911–1912: "The Living Corpse", Count Lyoff Tolstoy; "Hamlet", Shakespeare; Three Short Plays, Turgenieff.

Season of 1912–1913: "Peer Gynt", Ibsen; "Yekaterina Ivanovna", Andreieff; *"Le Malade Imaginaire"*, Molière.

Season of 1913–1914: "Nikolai Stavrogin", Dostoievsky; "Thought", Andreieff.

Season of 1914–1915: "The Death of Pazuhin", Saltuikoff-Shchedrin; "Autumn Violins", Surgutchoff; Three Short Plays, Pushkin.

Season of 1915–1916; "There Will Be Joy", Merezhkovsky.

Season of 1916–1917: No new productions.

Season of 1917–1918: "The Village Stepantchikovo", Dostoievsky.

The supremacy of the Moscow Art Theatre, however, lies more securely in its perfection and thorough application of a dramatic principle, the principle of realism. The fact that it has reached the end of its tether, that it is simply applying this principle all over again with each new play which it produces, has served latterly to rouse the charge that it has fulfilled its purpose, that it has had its day. From its earliest years, the adherence of Stanislavsky to the belief in realism

as an art method has borne the brunt of bitter attack. Meyerhold quarrelled first within the company and then, leaving it, he has spent the last ten years in attacking the theories of the Art Theatre and in making productions as utterly different as the theatre will permit. Alice Koonen, trained under Stanislavsky and the first of the Mytyls in "The Blue Bird", has seceded and with Alexander Tairoff has founded the experimental Kamerny Theatre. Kommissarzhevsky has fought the good gray leader with dialectic and with experiment. But the Art Theatre goes on its way regardless of the epithets dragged from the dictionary to be hurled at it. Once in a while Stanislavsky leaves his chosen path for an experiment of his own, such as the highly imaginative and symbolic production of "The Blue Bird." Or he invites Gordon Craig to come to Moscow to set "Hamlet" on his stage. Even Craig, uncompromising as he is against realism, admits that if you are determined to have realism in your theatre you must go to school to Stanislavsky. And those who have lost interest in the Art Theatre and who have turned their attention to the newer experimental stages, confess that no study of the modern theatre is complete without Stanislavsky. By the mere lapse of time, the Moscow Art Theatre, a revolutionist in 1900, has become conservative. It has settled into a tradition.

The key to the Art Theatre's attainment of realistic appearance, it seems to me, is its stark sincerity and its use of a certain minimization. Some of the minor

customs of the theatre have played their part. No applause is permitted, even at the act ends or after the final curtain. The more democratic audiences of the theatre under the Revolution have often sought to show their approval in this customary manner, but they have been promptly hushed and the tradition has prevailed. Conjointly, there are no curtain calls, no chimes to announce the rise of the curtain, no music between the acts. The impression of a series of cross sections of life is carried out without the slightest artificial restriction.

The final achievement of the Art Theatre, however, is not mere realism, not realism alone brought to a startling mechanical perfection in its representation of life. Rather, it is a spiritualized realism, a use of the realistic form as a means and not an end, a means to the more vivid interpretation of life. Obviously, realism can not be spiritualized except by artists, supreme artists. And therein, I think, lies the claim of the Art Theatre to the leadership of the world.

Out of Russia to-day there comes no word but sorrow. Are the theatres still fulfilling their task of purging the Russian soul in its days of deepest anguish? Has Stanislavsky satisfied himself with all the details of "The Rose and the Cross", the new poetic drama by Alexander Blok which was in rehearsal long before I left Russia? And has it been brought to birth in the blood of the Terror? Have they revived "The Sea Gull" as they hoped to do for its twentieth anniversary? Have they been able to carry out their

plan to produce Tolstoy's "The Light That Shines in Darkness", a light in a darkness greater than even Tolstoy ever dreamed? I do not know. All I know is that if there yet remains any gleam of the elder life, that shrine in Kamergersky Pereulok nurtures it. All I know is that the world's first theatre will not, must not perish from the earth!

CHAPTER III

"The Blue Bird" and Stanislavsky

When you have traveled three quarters of the way around a world at war, risking the dangers of revolution and anarchy, and uncertain, except for a blind faith, whether or not you would find your goal still in existence, and when, after months of patient preparation and still more patient pilgrimage, you find yourself in the presence of that which you had sought, then you come as near to the humbleness of the prophets who saw visions of old as any man is likely to come to-day.

Months have passed and yet somehow I am still too near to that December afternoon when the Moscow Art Theatre resumed its season, too near to those hours when "The Blue Bird" unfolded its fairy panorama to write dispassionately of them. I can not tell surely whether it was the arrival at the shrine or the overwhelming beauty of the production of Maeterlinck's *féerie* which brought the tears to my eyes and sobered and chastened and then lightened my spirit. Only this I know: I have seen "The Blue Bird" twice and again after that first afternoon and its simple beauty was even more profoundly affecting.

The man to whom, more than to any one else, the Moscow Art Theatre owes its preëminence in the world to-day is also directly and personally responsible for the bounties of " The Blue Bird." The programme in the afternoon had carried the name of Stanislavsky as *postanovka* or producer. Further proof came that evening when I was in his dressing room between the acts of " The Three Sisters." I asked him eagerly for photographs of the scenes of " The Blue Bird " or else for the original designs of the scenic artist so that I might have them copied. I thought I had seen the latter reproduced in Jacques Rouché's *" L'Art Théatral Modern."* The photographs, I was told, were not available — except those of the players themselves — for the original negatives had been made by Fischer, a German, and had been destroyed in the pogrom at the beginning of the war in 1914. And in the difficult times Russia has undergone since then, no others have been made. When I pressed my point and asked about the original designs, the firm, square but kindly face of my host carried a passing glance of embarrassed modesty and then admitted that there were no designs. He had conceived them himself and had personally directed the artist, V. E. Yegoroff, in the execution of the settings. And Monsieur Rouché, sitting where I was sitting, some time before the war, had made his own sketches from the photographs which were no longer extant. Before I left Moscow, however, I found some sketches by an unnamed artist which convey roughly the impression of the stage pictures.

Ten days before the theatre reopened I had found my way to the office through a side door and there I had arranged my schedule for the first two weeks. I did not penetrate farther into the building, however, for I wished to see it for the first time under the lights and in the expectation that always and forever lurks in every theatre before the play begins. The same door, though, carried me farther at noon on the appointed day, for Moscow matinees are early. And before I knew it — the theatre is so perfect a unity — I had passed through several corridors and on into the simple and restful auditorium and to my seat in the wide transverse aisle a third of the way back from the stage.

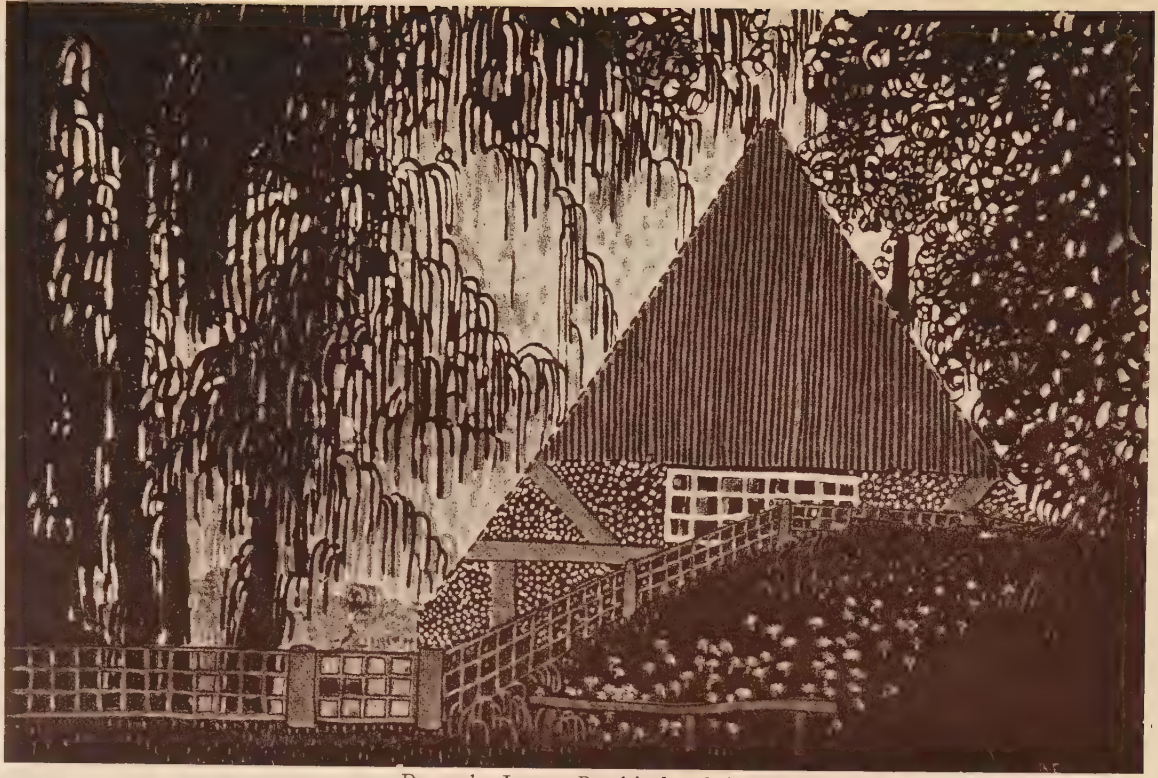
In the ten seasons since "The Blue Bird" was presented for the first time in the world on the stage of the Moscow Art Theatre, nearly three years in advance of its first performance in Paris, the original production has been repeated two hundred and seventy times. It is, therefore, one of the most substantial and familiar members of the Art Theatre repertory, for even some of the best known of the Tchehoff plays can not point to such a record. And in that time the interpretation probably has not varied any more than it does in the course of the half dozen performances a month, for with the extensive company of the Art Theatre there are several players for many of the rôles. Two important omissions have been made since the early days of the play's history, — the fifth tableau, the second scene of the third act, in the forest; and the seventh

tableau, the second scene in the fourth act, the cemetery. These two scenes, Stanislavsky told me, had frightened the children; and inasmuch as "The Blue Bird" was intended primarily for them and is practically always played at matinees for their benefit, they were left out in spite of the fact that the scene in the cemetery was one of the most characteristically Russian in the entire production.

As it is now presented at the Art Theatre, "The Blue Bird" is in five acts, instead of the playwright's original six, and seven scenes instead of the twelve Maeterlinck wrote. The first act is at the home of the woodcutter; the second at the Fairy's Palace and in the Land of Memory; the third in the Palace of Night; the fourth in the Kingdom of the Future; and the last the Farewell and the Awakening. Three other scenes from the original manuscript, therefore, were never included — the one in the Palace of the Joys and two before the curtain. Even to-day the performance runs something over four hours.

For prelude to a glimpse of "The Blue Bird" as it is set forth on the stage of the Art Theatre, I can think of nothing that will disclose the guiding purpose of that embodiment and unlock the secret of its simple spiritual power so well as these lines from Stanislavsky's address to the players just before they began the work of study and rehearsal:

"The production of 'The Blue Bird' must be made with the purity of fantasy of a ten-year-old child. It must be naïve, simple, light, full of the joy of life,



Drawn by Jacques Rouché after design by Yegoroff; from Theatre Arts Magazine

"THE BLUE BIRD" AT THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE. "THE FAREWELL"

NIKOLAI FYODOROVITCH KOLIN

OLGA VLADIMIROVNA BAKLANOVA

Photographs by Borakchieff, Moscow

MIHAIL ALEXANDROVITCH TCHEHOFF, NEPHEW OF THE PLAYWRIGHT

LEADING PLAYERS TRAINED IN THE FIRST STUDIO OF THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE

cheerful and imaginative like the sleep of a child; as beautiful as a child's dream and at the same time as majestic as the ideal of a poetic genius and thinker.

" Let ' The Blue Bird ' in our theatre thrill the grandchildren and arouse serious thoughts and deep feelings in their grandparents. Let the grandchildren on coming home from the theatre feel the joy of existence with which Tyltyl and Mytyl are possessed in the last act of the play. At the same time let their grandfathers and grandmothers once more before their impending death become inspired with the natural desire of man: to enjoy God's world and be glad that it is beautiful. . . .

" If man were always able to love, to understand, to delight in nature! If he contemplated more often, if he reflected on the mysteries of the world and took thought of the eternal! Then perhaps the Blue Bird would be flying freely among us. . . .

" In order to make the public listen to the fine shades of your feelings, you have to live them through yourself intensely. To live through definite intelligible feelings is easier than to live through the subtle soul vibrations of a poetic nature. To reach those experiences it is necessary to dig deep into the material which is handed to you for creation. To the study of the play we shall devote jointly a great deal of work and attention and love. But that is little. In addition, you have to prepare yourselves independently.

" I speak of your personal life observation which will broaden your imagination and sensitiveness.

Make friends of children. Enter into their world. Watch nature more and her manifestations surrounding us. Make friends of dogs and cats and look oftener into their eyes to see their souls. Thereby, you will be doing the same as Maeterlinck did before he wrote the play, and you will come closer to the author. . . .

" More than anything else, we must avoid theatricalness in the external presentation of ' The Blue Bird ' as well as in the spiritual interpretation, for it might change the fairy dream of the poet into an ordinary extravaganza.

" In this regard, the play is all the time balancing on the edge of a knife. The text pulls the play in one direction and the remarks of the author in another. We must look at these remarks with particular attention and understand in them the hidden plot and intention of the author. The ordinary conventional approach to executing these remarks will inevitably bring theatricalness which will convert the play into extravaganza.

" In every extravaganza, the walls assume fantastic contours, and the public knows perfectly well that this is accomplished by transparencies and gauzes. In each ballet, the dancers spring out from the parting scenery. Their gauze costumes have a similarity just like soldiers' uniforms. . . . A hundred times we have seen the transformation of Faust and we know that his costume is pulled down from him through a hole in the floor. We are weary of transparent halls with running chil-

dren. What can be more horrible than a child as a theatrical supernumerary?

" All these effects carried out literally according to the directions of the author will kill the seriousness and the mystic solemnity of the work of the poet and thinker. All the given directions are important for the substance of the play and they should be carried out, — not by old theatrical means, but by new ones, by better ones which the latest technique of the stage has invented. . . .

" The decorations must be naïve, simple, light and unexpected, just like children's imaginations."

It is as snug a little cottage as you ever saw that the great brown curtains of the Art Theatre disclose as they sweep imperially and noiselessly apart and out of sight at the sides of the proscenium arch. Set well back inside a dark colored false proscenium, the room is warm and intimate and at the same time safely out of reach and ready for fairy hands to transform. Squarely in front, one on each side of the stage, are the substantial wooden cradles of Tyltyl and Mytyl. To the right, the clock, and the door through which Father and Mother Tyl depart on tiptoe; to the left, the great hood of the fireplace and the tables on which the milk and the bread repose in silence; at the back, the windows high in the wall and the table beneath them. Soon the fairy hands begin their task. The lamp on the table relights itself and takes up a new position halfway between floor and ceiling. The shutters of the windows clap open and reveal the golden glow of

the Christmas tree across the way against a background of deepest blue. It isn't long until Tyltyl and Mytyl are wide awake and the Fairy has come and Tyltyl has the cap with the diamond in it. With one turn to the right, he has converted the woodcutter's simple cabin into Aladdin's palace. Golden snowflakes, shifting and changing in hue, transfigure the things of every day, and even the roof of the cottage is set with precious stones.

I am not at all sure that the dance of the hours as they escape from the clock is as effective as it was in the American production, although it is a jolly bit of grotesquerie, but no comparison is possible in the other moments of the scene. In the Russian production, the changes by which Fire and Water and Milk and Bread and the rest come to life are so unobtrusive and so casual that it all takes your breath as completely as it did that of Tyltyl and Mytyl. Here is fairy done in the spirit of fairy! The dog and the cat, too, come to life quite as you know they would if they had the opportunity. And then when they have tried in vain to return to their olden forms and have been enlisted by the Fairy in the search for the Blue Bird, the elfin cavalcade trips out the window to the most bewitching little march, a refrain that returns several times throughout the play whenever the Fairy and her train start anew on their search for the Blue Bird. In it Ilya Sats, the composer of the music for the production, has gathered the entire expectant and wide-eyed wonder of the play.

The next scene is indeed at the home of the Fairy. No one else but a Greek king or Gordon Craig would think of building such a soaring place to live in. Great stone steps run up until they are small and then disappear, still climbing upward. Stone pillars flank and follow them on their way. And a vaulted ceiling of brown and gold sweeps far upward to keep them from brushing the sky. The scene is brief and full of the human nature of the various characters as they clothe themselves in their new garments, and so only the practiced eye will stop to consider how simply this imposing picture has been achieved. In essentials it consists only of two curtains, one for the massive staircase and its pillars and the other for the vaulted ceiling behind it. But they have been designed and placed by a supreme artist and that makes all the difference in the world!

Other notable moments this scene possesses, both grave and gay. Probably no one but a Russian with the strain of the Oriental in his imagination would have dreamed the costume of Bread with its grotesque but breezy opulence of form and color. And that is a happy stroke, too, which directed the Cat to hold his plumed hat so that it might look like his tail. But the moment where Russian genius has surpassed even the keen and sensitive imagination of Maeterlinck is at the entrance of Light, when for a few moments before her radiant presence is seen at the door a choir of Russian voices is heard off stage in a snatch of Russian religious song. The heart leaps at this moment of rev-

erent imagination and henceforth "The Blue Bird" means more than it has ever meant before!

The third scene is the famous one in the Land of Memory, the one which has been used more than once in comparing our own and the Russian methods to the glorification of the simplicity and sincerity of the latter. For its opening moments Tyltyl and Mytyl are seen intimately enough but seemingly at a considerable distance, walking through a dimly lit wood. Now they have come to a sign that points the way and they stop to read it. Of course, it is not visible to the audience. As they go on their way hopefully, the wood fades gradually, almost imperceptibly, and in its stead, without crossing the two pictures, the cottage of Grandfather and Grandmother Tyl comes into view. First of all, the great curving lines in the sky back of the dimly seen gabled roof grow sharp and clear and seem to lead you back and down into this Land of Memory. Then the simple little house itself with its tall cocked hat of a roof becomes distinct in the increasing light with the good old grandparents sitting sleeping by the door.

If you are a very naïve and proper playgoer you will still feel only subconsciously the distance of the scene, its air of half reality; and you will not think to inquire of the surrounding circumstances how this result is attained. But if you are as keenly interested in how things are done in the theatre as you are in what is done, you will see now in the full, but not too full light of the scene that it is all being played at least

twenty-five feet back of the curtain line and in addition behind a fine meshed gauze screen. Only dimly can you see the curtains that lead back to this illuminated part of the stage, for the light is so admirably controlled that the intervening distance is potent but not obtrusive.

Of course, the welcome the children receive is hearty and Russian. There is something about Russian acting in scenes like this that has the naïve sincerity of actual life. Perhaps it is this gift variously applied that makes the great bulk of Russian acting so honest and so devoid of the artificial. And the farewell is as simple and affecting as the greeting. Then the cottage fades as it came into view and Tyltyl and Mytyl are again in the wood, where they find that the bird they had brought with them is not blue after all.

In some respects I think the scene in the Palace of Night, the fourth as the Art Theatre presents the play, is the most impressive. I am sure that no other stage picture, no other work of art in any field, has ever recreated and interpreted for me the awful stillness of the night as this scene did the moment the curtains parted. By line and by lighting Stanislavsky has achieved an unbelievable vastness with still farther and illimitable distance stretching out through a great arch of a window to a pathway of quietly winking stars, while off to the right, up a dimly seen flight of stairs and hundreds of yards back as far as the eye can reach, is a vaulted passageway, leading up to the day, you are sure! Somehow, too, the producer has been able to

stir in you the same feelings and the same attitude toward the course of events which Tyltyl has. The boy is the protagonist of this scene, even if he is not throughout the play, and you find yourself contemplating each forbidden door and vault with the same youthful courage and fearlessness as his and yet with the same desire to get through with it all and have your experience safely behind you.

The Art Theatre at this point varies the Maeterlinck scene text slightly, for instead of playing the last lines of the scene before the theatre curtain, Tyltyl and Mytyl discover their blue birds dead in a glorious bit of night forest set as far away as the scene in the Land of Memory.

The Kingdom of the Future now succeeds, — a soft, pale, half-formed scene. It is played in a soft but strong and glowing light behind gauze and its essentials once more are two curtains, — one to the fore marking off the scene with great tall columns, and the other far to the rear, vaulted as the scene in the Palace of the Fairy by an ingenious use of sweeping curved lines. In between the vaulted ceiling with its door into the sky and terrestrial things and the platforms and steps at the front, where most of the action of the scene takes place, is a depressed space or garden, adding variety very simply to the picture. Father Time isn't the graybeard of Anglo-Saxon tradition nor is his scythe like ours, but he plays with the same dignity we demand of our patriarch. It is this scene which brings the strikingly beautiful Russian face into play,

for it is here that the spirits of the unborn appear in robe and hood with only their faces, frank and child-like, uncovered. The waving hands at the last is a picture that remains long in memory.

The last act is now reached with its two scenes, the Farewell and the Awakening. The first of them is played outside the cottage home of Tyltyl and Myltyl in the gray light of approaching dawn. Up a little path-way the cottage stands and now you see the reason for the tall gable of the home of Grandfather and Grand-mother Tyl in the Land of Memory. For Tyltyl and Mytyl live in the same kind of a cottage and of course that is the kind they would picture for their grand-parents!

The simple pathos of the parting with their good friends all, after their night of adventure, is soon suc-ceeded by the awakening in the wooden cradles in the room where the play began. And the Russians con-trive to make this scene as eloquent of morning and of Christmas as they have made the previous scenes speak clearly the simple, hearty vision of their author.

There is not much to be said of the individual actors in " The Blue Bird "; and there should not be much to be said. For the play ought really to act itself and the Russians just let it do that very thing. Tcheban as Tylo, the dog, and Kolin as Tylette, the cat, however, contribute such restrained but suggestive characteriza-tions that our downright actors of animal parts might take lessons from them in the superiority of subtlety over the obvious. The comedian of the cast is rightly

Kudryavtsyeff as Bread, a part which he plays with gusto and unction. And Alexeieva has a sweet motherly charm as Light. The present Tyltyl of "The Blue Bird" is a girl and at no time is she as frankly and straightforwardly effective as young Hampden of the American production.

There is an engaging rhythm to the Russian title of "The Blue Bird." Transliterated it is "*Sinyaya Ptitsa*", with the long European "i" in both words and the accent on the first syllable in each case. This rhythm has been worked fascinatingly into the march by which the characters start each of their successive searches for the Blue Bird. Still, I think the title which carries the simple childlike atmosphere of the play best of all is the original which Maeterlinck chose, "*L'Oiseau Bleu.*"

The beauty of "The Blue Bird" in Moscow is a lyric beauty. It is not the precious and refined beauty of delicate carving on the one hand. Nor is it the terrifying beauty of some examples of Russian art. It falls halfway in between these two extremes, but it is no half mood itself. It is a beauty distinct and definite and honest, — a masterpiece of the man who is perhaps the master artist in the active modern theatre. Surely no one but Stanislavsky can be named in the next breath after Craig and Appia, the great dreamers and theorists of the modern theatre.

CHAPTER IV

The Plays of Tchehoff at the Art Theatre

The anarchs of esthetics may search the dictionary for bitter words to use against realism in art and particularly in the theatre. They may slay and bury with argument and dialectic the arch enemy of imagination. But the Moscow Art Theatre proceeds calmly on its way, still making eloquent use of this scorned manner of expression, just as if it were unaware of the conflict which has torn the modern theatre and the entire realm of art wide open.

My introduction to the realism of the Art Theatre came close on the heels of my surrender to the imaginative fantasies of "The Blue Bird." The evening after the Maeterlinck matinee I saw Tchehoff's "The Three Sisters", and a few nights later the same week, "The Cherry Orchard", his last and perhaps his greatest play. And my surrender to Tchehoff and to realism was just as complete. After that first week I saw both plays again, with an emotional reaction deeper and more profound, so that I know it was not merely the feelings attendant upon making the acquaintance of a long-cherished institution that characterized my first observation of them.

Whatever may be one's intellectual convictions concerning realism and its many-formed, still more or less uncrystallized opponents, there is nothing to do but to yield in the presence of the realism of the Art Theatre and for the time, at least, to forego judgment. As artist, my sympathies and instincts are still with those who are trying to find a remedy for realism in the theatre. But as critic, my tongue is silenced. Perhaps, after all, there is no decision. Perhaps there is room in a broad view of the theatre for both!

At this late date it is like explaining the invasion of Belgium to go into minute details regarding " The Three Sisters " and " The Cherry Orchard." By these two plays of Tchehoff and by his earlier piece, " The Sea-Gull ", which established the success of the theatre and gave it its insignia, — by these dramas and almost exclusively by them the Moscow Art Theatre has been published to the world. I shall limit myself, therefore, to a few personal impressions of them and of the men and the women and the methods by which they are made to live.

I think the master key to the Art Theatre's interpretation of Tchehoff and to its use of realism is a certain repression, a holding-back, a minimization, — the utter pole of the exaggeration which characterized the old florid rhetorical theatre and now once more the theatre of the impressionists and the futurists. The impression came to me vividly, with an inherent poignancy regardless of the matter of the scene, that this was life, not merely copied but interpreted or brought

A SCENE FROM ACT II OF TCHEHOFF'S "THE CHERRY ORCHARD" AT THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE

From Theatre Arts Magazine

THE CLIMAX OF ACT III IN TCHEHOFF'S "THE CHERRY ORCHARD," AT THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE

to the point where there seems to be no interpretation. And this impression came to me somehow from inside, not as if the actors were shrewdly and successfully copying life but as if they were driven by some unseen influence to live their lives in front of me in such a way that their joys and sorrows became clear to me even if they themselves did not understand. Of course, it is just this semblance, this interpretation of life which the Moscow Art Theatre has deliberately set out to achieve.

The plays of Tchehoff fit peculiarly into this method of art and this manner of interpreting life. Some one has said that the plays of Tchehoff are inconceivable outside the Art Theatre and the Art Theatre inconceivable without Tchehoff. That is only another way of saying the same thing. Tchehoff wrote not as a philosopher and certainly not as a propagandist. His aim seemed to be to take life as he found it, select the details which seemed to him to show forth the heart of the characters in his scene as well as the character of the scene itself and to present these details, woven into a loose but continuous fabric, much like the fabric of daily life, but more luminous of human motives and human destinies. The playwright himself, therefore, began the process of minimization. He knew that exaggeration called attention either to superficial aspects when it was in the hands of those without vision, or to the monumental outlines of life when it was used by genuine artists. What he desired, though, was to interpret life through its reticences, its nuances, its

slender moments. And only by relieving the tension and sharpening the attention could he reach this goal.

Minimization is the secret of "The Three Sisters" especially. Its minor key of futile ambition and restless, helpless longing would demand such treatment at the hands of any dramatist. With Tchehoff, the process is carried to even farther limits. The playwright himself has set forth life and passion and disappointment and even death without violent scenes. The Art Theatre has translated the play to the stage in subdued voices, awkward but eloquent pauses and a general retarding of the tempo until the spectator feels himself almost in the mood of the family in the Russian village which had its eyes fixed on Moscow but could not move its feet. In fact, it takes a day or two to throw off the spell of "The Three Sisters" and even longer to get out of the orbit of "The Cherry Orchard."

The power of "The Three Sisters", therefore, is cumulative and not climactic. The method of showing the three sisters in their home, with their brother, ambitious as themselves, is just the same in the first act as the method of revealing them shorn of their momentary dreams in the last. By the last act, however, you know them all so well that the emotional power of the same simple technique has been multiplied a thousand times.

Just to recall the story of the play for those whose volumes are not handy: Olga, Masha and Irina Prozoroff and their brother, Andrei, live in the small town

whither their father moved from Moscow years ago when his brigade was transferred there. Olga, the eldest, has found herself, after a manner, in her work in the local woman's college. Masha, however, was married young to Fyodor Ilyitch Kuluigin, good but common and too thick-witted for her extremely sensitive intelligence. Her unhappiness is just as great but more suppressed than that of the youngest, Irina, whose thoughts turn constantly to Moscow as the city of her dreams, and her work and her love and her future. To the village comes Lieutenant-Colonel Vershinin to join the troops stationed there. A man of fine sensibilities, he is lonely with a wife who is mentally unbalanced, and he and Masha almost immediately and instinctively reach out to each other. Irina has many suitors: the old military doctor, Tchebutuikin, one of those insufferable characters strangely tolerated as a hanger-on in many Russian families; Solyony, a staff captain, stupid, ill-mannered, equally unwelcome but similarly endured; and Baron Tuzenbach, whose worst trait is indecision and whose best is his affection for the ungrateful Solyony. Andrei, the brother, is ambitious to be a professor in the university in Moscow. But he forgets his dream, marries Natasha, a light-headed and fussy young person, and is content as a member of the local council. Masha's flowers wither when her new-found companionship with Vershinin is ended by the transfer of the regiment. And Irina, after giving up a part of her dream and agreeing to marry the Baron in order to escape the dullness of the

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village and go to Moscow, hears of his death in a duel which the jealous Solyony had compelled him to fight. And so the three sisters face the future in the dull gray village. Olga embraces Masha and Irina as the military band sounds far down the street and says: "The music plays so gaily, so boldly, and one wants to live! Time will pass and we shall go away forever. They will forget us; they will forget our faces, our voices; but our sufferings will pass into gladness for those who will live after us. Happiness and peace will come on the earth and they will remember with a good word those who live now. Oh, my dear sisters, our lives are not yet finished. We shall live! The music plays so joyfully, so gaily, and it seems that yet a little while and we shall know for what we live, for what we suffer. If only we knew! If only we knew!"

To me there are three great moments in "The Three Sisters", all of them between Vershinin and Masha and all of them deriving their greatness, I am aware, from the acting of Stanislavsky and Mme. Knipper. The first comes in the second act after the entrance of Masha and Vershinin. The room is dimly lighted and they are alone. The frank but quiet explanation of their separate disappointments merges as frankly into the avowal of their love. There is a fine reticence about Vershinin's confession and an aristocracy in the way Masha permits him to speak that carries through this scene a poignant but luminous ray of pain, and the whole is caught up in a rhythm that comes dangerously near closing and then is diverted once more into infinite space.

There is a similarity in the matter of the second great moment but a difference in tone and in rhythm. The act is the third, — that astonishing picture of a group of people waiting up the night and wearied by the excitement and the exhaustion of a fire in the village. There are others in the room, but their attention is not upon Vershinin and Masha over at the right. There is nothing really to call attention to them, for after the two have looked silently at one another a moment their conversation consists only of these syllables:

MASHA — "Tra-ta-ta?"
VERSHININ — "Tra-ta-ta."
MASHA — "Tra-ra-ram-tam-tam?"
VERSHININ — "Tra-ra-ram-tam-tam."

That is all. But by it is conveyed the most subtle and powerful rhythm in the world — the silent understanding of one man and one woman.

The last great moment, of course, is the farewell between the two and it comes near the end of the last act. Tchehoff's lines are brief, almost bare. Masha enters.

VERSHININ — "I came to bid you farewell."
MASHA (*looking him in the face*) — "Farewell." (*She gives him a lingering kiss.*)
OLGA — "Enough! Enough!" (*Masha breaks into tears.*)
VERSHININ — "Write to me. Don't forget! Let me go. It is time. Olga Sergeievna, take her. It is time for me to go already. I am late." (*He kisses Olga's hand, then once more embraces Masha and quickly goes away.*)

Out of these simple lines Stanislavsky and Knipper have constructed the proudest, most unaffected, most deeply moving farewell of the modern theatre. To see it is to feel a knife cut clean through the heart. There is sudden, piercing pain and then the rush of surging feeling, the fear and the pity that make tragedy of daily lives when the hand of a master touches them.

There is no actor on the English-speaking stage and I doubt if there is one in the world to-day who can do what Constantin Stanislavsky does in these scenes. My mind was still held in respect akin to awe at Stanislavsky, producer of " The Blue Bird ", when the curtain rose a few hours later on " The Three Sisters." Through the first act I don't remember noticing Stanislavsky, actor, any more than any of the others in the perfect ensemble. Then I suddenly awoke to the presence of towering genius in that quiet, unobtrusive scene in the second act. The third and the fourth followed with the proud anguish of that farewell, and I understood the secret of the Moscow Art Theatre. Genius in acting such as this is contagious as the smile of the April sun. And so to Stanislavsky, producer, and Stanislavsky, actor, must be added Stanislavsky, teacher, and probably the greatest teacher of acting our generation has known.

And I think there is only one actress on our stage who could do what Mme. Knipper did in the farewell of " The Three Sisters." That is Mrs. Fiske. In fact, Knipper reminds me often of Mrs. Fiske with her powerful sense of rhythmic control, her poise, her ret-

icence, her intellectual as well as her emotional mastery of a scene. I doubt whether she is Mrs. Fiske's equal in high comedy, for I have the instinctive feeling that her sense of humor is not strong.

" The Three Sisters " makes use of almost the entire first line of the company of the Art Theatre. Only Moskvin is missing and he used to play the young officer Rode. But he has yielded to the younger generation. Knipper, as I have said, is Masha. Butova and Germanova take turns as Olga, the eldest sister. I saw Butova only and found in her a fine dignity that fits her excellently for the rôle of the patient adviser of the troubled younger sisters. The rôle of the youngest, Irina, has been entrusted to many different hands. Zhdanova, a young player of fine sensibilities and very great promise, now completes the trio. Lilina, Stanislavsky's wife, makes a vivid and incisive etching of the fussy and pottering Natasha.

The strength of the Moscow Art Theatre company, however, lies in its men, and so the heavy demands of " The Three Sisters " in this direction are readily met. Of the first line, Katchaloff probably has least leeway to show what he can do, for as the indecisive Tuzenbach he is playing in a minor key that makes no use of his keen intellectual powers. Vishnevsky is capital as the well-meaning Kuluigin, arousing a sense of sympathy along with a tolerant smile. Massalitinoff uses a few bold, sure strokes to paint the picture of the irritating Solyony. By unobtrusive but telling means, Luzhsky makes a semi-tragic figure of the half-mood

Andrei, the brother of the three sisters. Nothing could be more eloquent of this interpretation of the rôle than his patient attention to the squeaky baby carriage under the trees in the last act. Gribunin is the military doctor, Tchebutuikin. Through Artyom's death a few years ago, this rôle as well as the others he played is really left vacant, for he was one of those absolutely unique geniuses which any art is likely to produce once in a generation and then lose the pattern. Gribunin, however, makes the old doctor sufficiently trenchant for the ensemble.

"The Cherry Orchard" has even less of a story than "The Three Sisters." Its emotional range is much greater, though, for it reaches from a light-hearted humor to the bitterest tragedy, and by just so much I think it is the greater play. Probably no one but the composer of "Home, Sweet Home" has so deliberately chosen love of locality for his subject matter as has Tchehoff in "The Cherry Orchard." The soul of this fine-flavored old estate almost comes to life and stalks the stage through its possessors' deep affection for it. They return to it from Paris, hold it close and dear for a while, and then have to give it up to a newer and a merchant generation to pay their accumulating debts. In "The Cherry Orchard" the old Russia is seen fading into the past. A new age is taking its place, energetic and somewhat heartless. And now to-day, less than two decades later — so swiftly do things move in Russian destiny — the Cherry Orchard is probably changing hands again.

This time there is no telling who will take it over, but there is little likelihood that he will pay for it.

As in "The Three Sisters", there is no dramatic moment of the highest order in the first act. The second act, out under the trees on the estate, passes in a similarly casual manner. The scene among the servants at its beginning is a notable snatch of gentle comedy. It is in the third act that "The Cherry Orchard" reaches its full dramatic stature in the scene where Lopahin announces that it is he who bought the Cherry Orchard. Tchehoff has laid contrasting ground for this scene in the games and the dances of the young people and in the whimsical quarrel and reconciliation between Liuboff Andreievna and Trofimoff, the student who loves her daughter, Anya. Suddenly into this atmosphere of light heart and laughter comes Gaieff, the brother of Liuboff Andreievna, with a word of warning and close on his heels Lopahin, slightly intoxicated, who blurts out in answer to Liuboff's question as to who bought the Cherry Orchard, "I bought it!" And then, as the woman who personified her home sinks silent and broken into her seat, the new proprietor smashes a chair against the floor and bids them all proceed with the dance, for he is now master here!

The last act is outwardly less intense and dramatic, but inwardly far more moving and piteous and in the end even tragic. The living room of the first act is dismantled. Boxes and packing cases have replaced chairs and carpets and curtains. But if the greeting

of the Cherry Orchard was like the welcome of a person, the farewell is much more intimate and touching. When Gaieff and his sister linger behind all the rest and seem unable to tear themselves away from the walls and the floors that have been home, then human affection for inanimate objects which have been hallowed by human associations reaches perhaps its most eloquent moment in all literature. The glimpse of tragedy — only a glimpse, for more of it would be unbearable — comes at the very end when old Firce, the butler, forgotten and left behind with the walls and the floors, totters into the room, only to find the doors locked and the windows barred. And so he draws himself up into a great black chair and breathes his last.

Stanislavsky's rôle in "The Three Sisters" is one of quiet dignity. In "The Cherry Orchard" as Gaieff, there is less serious dignity, even a genial sense of humor, but the rôle is even quieter and less assertive. It is difficult, therefore, to pick out moments when the actor makes the part most eloquent. The subtle shadings, the sense of poise, the beauty of spirit, — these are the chief elements in the actor's masterly portrait.

Knipper is more at home in the rôle of Liuboff Andreievna than she is as Masha in "The Three Sisters." This is true superficially, for as Masha she now looks to be the eldest instead of the second of the sisters, while in "The Cherry Orchard" the rôle she plays is almost exactly her own age. Artists like Knipper, however, rise above all such considerations.

And the reason for her greater fitness for her work in the last of her husband's plays must be sought elsewhere. I think it lies in the leeway which the rôle gives her for a more varied portrait. She is the woman of the world and of affairs in the first act when she returns to her cherished estate and again in the third when she sees it drawn irrevocably from her grasp. She is the mother who has not had children heedlessly in the first act when the appearance of Trofimoff brings keenly to mind the little son he had taught until death had taken him. She is the mother once more in the third act, the mother who will follow her children through all their paths and their relationships, not too closely except once in a while; she is the mother when she wounds the dignity of the lover of her daughter and then brings him back to a generous reconciliation. And she is just the simple human being shorn of something she has held dear when in the final act her eyes fill with tears as she looks for the last time on the age-stained walls of the lost home.

"The Cherry Orchard" would be memorable if only because it gave me my first view of Moskvin, whom I have acknowledged since then as the greatest high comedian of the Russian theatre. As Yepihodoff, one of the servants, he finds opportunity for one of the most individualistic rôles in his repertory. Whether it be his embarrassed conversation with Lopahin in the first act, or his singing out of tune in the scene with the other servants under the trees in the second, or his breaking of the billiard cue in the third,

or his heedless disregard of his hands while he nails up boxes and watches the departure of the family in the last act, — always he brings the smile which is the reward of high comedy, never the uproarious laughter which is the boon of farce.

Massalitinoff as the merchant Lopahin justifies the faith which he aroused in the small rôle of Solyony in "The Three Sisters." He makes of the purchaser of the Cherry Orchard a man of common birth, little education except that of experience, a good heart, a likable personality so long as he retains his self-control, and an animal with violent feelings and frank expression of them when he loses that control.

Perhaps the most astonishing fact to an American who is used to seeing an actor in one company one year and in another the next or even in several companies in the course of a single season, is the number of players in both of the Tchehoff dramas who are still playing their original rôles. I went back over the records and I found that after over two hundred and forty performances and seventeen years after its first production, five of the most important rôles of "The Three Sisters" are still played by those who created them February 13, 1901, — Andrei, Masha, Kuluigin, Natasha and Vershinin. And another actor of the original cast is still in the list playing another rôle. "The Cherry Orchard", only three years younger, has six rôles still played by those who created them, January 30, 1904, — Liuboff, Gaieff, Simeonoff-Pishchik, Charlotta, Dunyasha and Yasha, while Lilina has merely changed

From Theatre Arts Magazine

THE FINAL MOMENTS OF ACT IV OF TCHEHOFF'S "UNCLE VANYA," AT THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE

AS GAIEFF IN TCHEHOFF'S "THE CHERRY ORCHARD"

Saharoff, Moscow

AS COLONEL VERSHININ IN TCHEHOFF'S "THE THREE SISTERS"

STANISLAVSKY IN TWO OF HIS FAVORITE RÔLES AT THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE

from the rôle of Anya to that of the adopted daughter, Varya. Probably no other company in the world, certainly few companies in the history of the theatre, can point to such a record!

The story of Tchehoff's connection with the Moscow Art Theatre is one of peculiar significance both for playwright and playhouse. Nothing in the history of the modern drama, not even the fortunate coöperation of Synge and the Abbey Theatre of Dublin, proves more conclusively the interdependence of the dramatist and the stage whereon his work may be exhibited with sympathy and understanding.

"It would be idle to measure exactly," writes the Russian critic, Efros, "whether Tchehoff did more for the Art Theatre or the Art Theatre more for Tchehoff. At any rate, the Art Theatre would not be what it is if it had not been for 'The Sea Gull' and 'Uncle Vanya' and the problems they brought to the stage and to the actors. It is equally true that were it not for the Art Theatre, Tchehoff would not have written at least 'The Three Sisters' and 'The Cherry Orchard' in the form of dramas. The Art Theatre deserves well from the Russian stage and Russian society for having destroyed Tchehoff's prejudice that he could not succeed in the drama, and thus bringing about the appreciation of Tchehoff and making the theatre dear, necessary and close to the people."

Tchehoff's name entered with great weight into that first conversation between Stanislavsky and Nyemirovitch-Dantchenko concerning a popular art theatre.

In the previous year, 1896, " The Sea Gull " had failed at the Alexandrinsky in Petrograd, but the significance of this new force in Russian dramatic literature was apparent to a few. " It would be an exaggeration," Efros writes, " to say that the Art Theatre was created in order to play Tchehoff. But it would be true to say that the Art Theatre was created because the dramaturgy of Tchehoff existed, waiting for its stage representation, its theatre, since it was misunderstood and rejected by the old theatres."

Tchehoff appeared for the first time at one of the rehearsals for " Tsar Fyodor Ivanovitch ", which opened the first season, but no one suspected then the tie which he was forming with the theatre. Concerning that relationship, Nyemirovitch-Dantchenko has written:

" Tchehoff did not know the theatre in the first year of its life. And only few actors knew of Tchehoff. Many even began to know him and admire him only after associating their creative powers with his. Five years later he died. And during this short interval the artistic coöperation was so intimate that hardly a serious rehearsal went by without the mention of the name of Tchehoff."

" The Sea Gull " was disclosed on the stage of the Art Theatre, December 30, 1898, — before the holidays or on December 17, according to the Russian calendar. Tchehoff spent that winter in Yalta, refused to believe the stories of the success of his play which his friends sent him, and returned to Moscow only after

the season was closed. Upon his arrival, however, a close friendship sprang up between him and the artists of the theatre, who wished to add his "Uncle Vanya" to their repertory. Tchehoff had submitted the play to the theatrical literary committee of the Small Imperial Theatre, where his friends, Lyensky and Youzhin and the *régisseur* Kondratyeff, were working to have it accepted. The committee made objections to the third act, the playwright refused to revise it, and the manuscript went to the Art Theatre, where it was brought to the stage for the first time on November 7, 1899.

There were now two of his plays in the repertory of the Art Theatre and yet Tchehoff, exiled by his health to a southern winter, had not seen either of them in performance. When the request came for a third play, he stubbornly refused, saying that he could not do new work for the theatre until he saw how they presented the plays he had already given them. And so it was that in the spring of 1900, the entire company traveled south to the Crimea just to show "The Sea Gull" and "Uncle Vanya" to their author. Four performances were given in Sevastopol and eight in Yalta, with Hauptmann's "Lonely Lives" and Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler" added for the sake of variety. Tchehoff came by boat to Sevastopol, where the whole theatre met him at the docks. And then in Yalta, the home of the playwright, built by himself, and his garden, planted by himself, were the rendezvous for a brilliant excursion group, with the youthful Gorky

present in his budding power and fame, and the glory of the Crimean springtime over all.

The new play, "The Three Sisters", was written in the summer of 1900 in Yalta and rewritten in Moscow in early autumn. It was read to the actors for the first time in the presence of the author, but during rehearsals he slipped away to Nice and on the eve of the first performance concealed himself in Naples. Success was the play's immediate lot in Moscow on its disclosure, February 13, 1901, and also in Petrograd at the end of the season, where it overshadowed "Uncle Vanya." Playwright and playhouse came closer than ever together under the influence of this play, and it is to this time that Tchehoff's marriage to Knipper belongs.

Two seasons passed before the next play was ready. The winter of 1901–1902 had been marked by Ibsen's "The Wild Duck" and Hauptmann's "Michael Kramer", with "The Three Sisters" continuing in the repertory. The youthful Gorky had dominated the season of 1902–1903 with his "Smug Citizens" and "The Lower Depths." The following winter had been devoted in advance to "Julius Cæsar" and a new play by Tchehoff. "I write four lines a day and those with intolerable torment," is a confession in a letter from Tchehoff in the autumn of 1903. "The Cherry Orchard" was finally completed, though, and the physicians permitted the playwright to return to Moscow when the cold dry winter set in. More than ever he entered into the life and the problems of the

theatre, reading the plays sent to it and giving his opinion of them. From November, he attended rehearsals regularly until he became agitated by the slow progress of such work. He had no great faith in the play, either, and half-jokingly, half-seriously, he would say, "Buy it for three thousand rubles." "You wish to sell?" came the reply, "We guarantee ten thousand."

The first performance took place January 30, 1904, on the author's name day, and his numerous friends in Moscow and especially in the theatre united to make it a gala occasion. The full appreciation of the rich texture of the playwright's swan song, however, was not fully appreciated until later seasons. In fifteen years, "The Cherry Orchard" has seldom been out of the repertory and it has been performed nearly four hundred times.

At Tchehoff's death in July, 1904, the Art Theatre was left without a playwright of the first rank to work in close coöperation with it. Over a decade has passed and still the place of Tchehoff is as vacant as the chair of Synge among the Irish Players. Whence and when will a successor arise? Will he be born out of the furnace of revolution? Or will he wait the coming of a new order and a new peace? Meanwhile, there is Tchehoff, — as true and inspiring to-day as he was when the Art Theatre rescued him from despondency and encouraged him to push on to the heights of the modern drama.

CHAPTER V

From Turgenieff to Gorky at the Art Theatre

Turgenieff, Dostoievsky, Gorky, — these giants of Russian literature and drama the Art Theatre has made its own no less than Tchehoff. Ostrovsky it has sampled, but for the most part it has left the perpetuation of his memory to the Small State Theatre. In general, the same method by which Tchehoff is interpreted has served with equal eloquence for Gorky and has instilled new life and meaning into the work of the masters of past generations. That method in the large is a spiritualized realism, but the mold is not used slavishly. The minimization by which the effect of "The Three Sisters" and "The Cherry Orchard" is heightened gives way in the plays of Turgenieff to an easy and graceful sense of gesture, in the dramatized stories of Dostoievsky to a strange tautness without strain, and in the dramas of Gorky to an upwelling defiance and challenge toward life that approaches the rhetorical.

I have never seen anything more overpowering in any theatre than Stanislavsky's production of the master drama of Russia's living master of the drama, *"Na Dnye"* of Maxim Gorky. The play has been known by report ever since it was disclosed at the Art

Theatre in the season of 1902–1903, especially since it came closer to us shortly afterwards in German translation and production at the *Kleines Theatre* in Berlin and in English translation by Laurence Irving at the Kingsway Theatre, London, in December, 1911. "*Nachtasyl*" it was called in the German version, and hence it was known to us for years as "A Night's Lodging." In the English version the title is "The Lower Depths", a much more faithful rendering of the Russian, which literally means "On the Bottom."

In reality, however, it has never been known outside of Moscow, where the Art Theatre first exhibited it, and Petrograd, Warsaw and the cities of Germany and Austria, where the Art Theatre carried it on tour in the spring of 1906. It has not been known because with its wild argot of the Russian slums it defies translation into any other language. It has not been known because with its terrible and awe-inspiring insight into the Russian soul it defies interpretation by any one but Russian artists. It has not been known although it has been played in many corners of the Russian realm, because only the most fearless, only the most searching of Russian artists can plumb Gorky's vision to its lowest depth and bring up from its unspeakable misery and degradation the clear cry of human faith and the gentle whisper of chastening pity.

The rhythm of any work of art is most perfect when it refuses most emphatically to be made known through any other media but its own. If I were ruthlessly honest, therefore, I would leave a blank page as

my mute tribute to the Art Theatre's production of " The Lower Depths " as the peak of the modern realistic stage. For, just as " The Lower Depths " admits of no adequate transmutation from its original tongue and stage, so does its embodiment in that tongue and on that stage baffle descriptive and appreciative record. To relate its fragile plot and to map the cross-skeins of its blind human motives is like drawing a diagram of the score of Stravinsky's " Petrushka " according to the laws of mathematics and physics. For once, the novelist turned dramatist has given up his reliance on mere words, and with the aid of a sympathetic theatre, an Art Theatre — a THEATRE, in the strict and simple significance of that word — has depended on the far more eloquent means of expression peculiar to the dramatic art. " The Lower Depths ", therefore, is not so much a matter of utterable line and recountable gesture as it is of the intangible flow of human souls in endlessly shifting contact one with another. Awkward but eloquent pauses and emphases, the scarcely perceptible stress or dulling of word or gesture, the nuances and the shadings of which life is mostly made and by which it reveals its meaning, — these and the instinctive understanding of the vision of the artist by those who seek to interpret him are the incalculable and unrecordable channels through which " The Lower Depths " becomes articulate at the Moscow Art Theatre.

Russia's most abject social misery is shown forth in Gorky's masterpiece. By the side of it, the degra-

Fisher, Moscow

A SCENE IN ACT I OF MAXIM GORKY'S MASTERPIECE, "THE LOWER DEPTHS," AT THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE. STANISLAVSKY IN THE RÔLE OF SATINE SITS ON THE TABLE

Fisher, Moscow

A SCENE IN ACT III OF TURGENIEFF'S ROMANTIC COMEDY, "A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY," AT THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE. STANISLAVSKY AS RAKITIN AND KNIPPER AS MME. ISLAIEVA IN THE CENTER

dation of the French naturalists is roseate and romantic. By the side of it, the despair of Dostoievsky is sentient and hopeful. The scenes of "The Lower Depths" introduce us to men and women living and dreaming and doubting and believing below the dead line: thieves and prostitutes and drunkards and tatterdemalions, their sleek hostess and her shrivelled master, and a pilgrim who is one of them and yet not of them and whom they tolerate because he understands them, not because they understand him. Death intrudes among them, and jealousy and the last flickerings of ambition and revenge, each intrusion stirring a ripple of feeling and then vanishing with only a trace upon souls whose defiance of life is beaten dull. Long after the final curtain has closed these night-shadows of the human spirit from view, there echoes in the heart of the stunned observer the appalling gloom of the song they sing:

The sun it rises and it sets.
In my prison darkness reigns.
Day and night the warders go, alas! alas!
Pacing underneath my window.

You can guard me as you like —
I'm not going to run away,
Longing, longing to be free, alas! alas!
But my chains I can not break.

Oh, my chains, my heavy chains,
You're my watchman forged of iron.
I can't take you off and rend you, alas! alas!
My soul is tired, my spirit broken.

Sunbeams never find me here.
Song of birds I have forgot.
My heart it withers like the flowers, alas! alas!
I wish my eyes would cease to see.

To have lived these hours with the outcasts of humankind is to be purged through pity and fear as by the most austere of Greek tragedy. Seared by sorrow as no other race of our time, the Russian has often emerged in the pages and the scenes of his artists and writers as a god rising out of the ashes of despair and grovelling debasement. Raskolnikoff thus mounts from the depths in Dostoievsky's "Crime and Punishment." Tolstoy first lived through such a metamorphosis and then throughout the rest of his days recorded his experiences in various guises. But in "The Lower Depths" Gorky has chosen a still lower round of the ladder, — those for whom there is no hope in the mortal flesh. And yet even here, there is the gleam of the god in man.

The astonishing simplicity of the Art Theatre's embodiment of the play would count for nothing if the players had not seen the vision with the playwright. The drab faithfulness of the setting would be an empty shell without the soul of Gorky's men and women made manifest in the actors. Its gloom and its rags and its filth would be merely disgusting if they were not fused into a single work of art with the pitiful wraiths who stalk among them. Stanislavsky as the shaggy Satine; Katchaloff as the Baron; Moskvin as Luka, the pilgrim; Luzhsky as the touzled Bub-

noff; Vishnevsky as the Tatar; Gribunin as the corrupt policeman, Miedviedieff — these are the entire first line of the men of the company, with the exception of Massalitinoff, who is Satine in Stanislavsky's absence. Mme. Knipper used to play Nastya, but she has yielded in recent years to Halyoutina. With that single exception, the leading rôles are cast as at the first performance nearly a score of years ago.

It matters much in current chronicles that Maxim Gorky became propagandist and ceased to be artist at least a decade ago. In a long view, though, that fact is of little consequence. By his early work, he has set his name beyond erasure in the foremost rank of Russian genius. In his plays as in his novels, Gorky recalls Dickens with his character studies. But for the sentimentality of Dickens he substitutes the firmer motivation of the philosopher, while his dramatic gift is a boon which Dickens would have envied keenly. In his own time and country, Gorky challenges comparison most frequently with Tchehoff and Andreieff. From that process, Tchehoff emerges as dramatist alone, Andreieff as dramatist and propagandist, and Gorky as dramatist and philosopher. Through the lips of Satine in those lines of Promethean defiance in the last act, Gorky the philosopher speaks. And his philosophy, like that of all virile imaginations, is the philosophy of the superman, a superman Russianized and humanized from the stark sublimity of Nietzsche.

To the English-speaking world, Ivan Turgenieff is

known wholly as a novelist, but in Russia he has the added reputation of dramatist. I saw four of his plays in the repertory at the Art Theatre. Chief of them is "A Month in the Country", a somewhat sober comedy in five acts revived by Stanislavsky in the season of 1909–1910. Three others, briefer pieces, are grouped in a single bill: "The Boarder", only the first act of which is played; "Where It Is Thin, There It Tears", and "The Lady from the Provinces."

In "A Month in the Country", as in much of his writing, Turgenieff is autobiographical, telling the story of his own disappointed romance as a youth in his early twenties before he left Russia to live abroad. His love for the wife of a friend, partially but not wholly returned, cast a shadow over the young man which was instrumental in his departure from Russia. Stanislavsky and Katchaloff alternate in the central rôle of Rakitin. I saw Katchaloff make it one of his most suave and gracious characterizations. Whenever Stanislavsky plays the part, as he is shown in the accompanying photograph, he makes up to look exactly like the portraits of Turgenieff of the period of 1840.

Like most novelists who turn to the drama, Turgenieff carries the narrative technique to the stage. The result is a play without clash or climax, a leisurely arranged juxtaposition of characters and scenes drawn with the sure hand and the faultless taste of a literary master. "A Month in the Country" is the faithful record of life among the great landed proprietors in the early part of the last century, imported France

crossed with native Russia. And this record is set forth with all the urbanity, the distinction, and the style of "A Sportman's Notebook", "Virgin Soil", "Fathers and Children" and "Smoke."

The shorter plays in like manner are rambling and sketchy, — a novelist's outing in the theatre. Sharply etched portraits and an inimitable style distinguish them all, rather than their modicum of dramatic action. For all four pieces, the artist, M. V. Dobuzhinsky, has designed settings and costumes happily in keeping with the gentility of a gracious age.

Other plays that passed my observation brought out one phase or another of the Art Theatre's method of spiritualized realism. Sometimes, as in the case of "In the Claws of Life" and "At the Tsar's Door", two plays by Knud Hamsun, the Norwegian dramatist, the theatre seems to bestow virtues upon the manuscript which it does not rightly possess. Once, in Surgutchoff's "Autumn Violins", a quadrangle of contemporary affections, I felt that the play verged dangerously near the sentimental, although the actors worked faithfully to carry it to a higher mood. The third act is notable for one of the crowded ensemble scenes in which the Art Theatre apparently delights. The greater the challenge to convey the similitude of life, the more eager Stanislavsky and his artists seem to be to overcome the inherent difficulties. It is a triumph of this kind in the reception scene in Griboyedoff's *"Gore ot Uma"* which distinguishes the Art Theatre's production of this fine old Russian classic

from that at the Small State Theatre. A great deal might be said of Saltuikoff-Shchedrin's comedy, " The Death of Pazuhin ", with its ample opportunities for Moskvin as high comedian, but the problems of realism on the stage involved in it are more vividly displayed in the plays of Tchehoff.

Three times in its twenty years, the Moscow Art Theatre has delved into Dostoievsky and brought to its stage a group of scenes which approximate the form of a play sufficiently to justify their adaptation from their original metier. The first of the novels to yield to this treatment was " The Brothers Karamazoff " in the season of 1910–1911. " Nikolai Stavrogin " followed in 1913–1914. The latest borrowing from the pages of the greatest novelist is also the latest production at the Art Theatre, — " The Village Stepantchikovo." First revealed in 1917, it had just passed its thirtieth performance when I left Russia. It is one of the earlier and shorter works of Dostoievsky, having been published in 1859 in two hundred pages, and it has not yet been reached in translation into English.

The greatest novelist is passionately interested in humanity, the human spirit as it expresses itself concretely in the individual. When you have finished one of his novels, especially one of his greater works, you do not think of it as a story. You have no recollection of plot. You have been living with a group of people who have laid bare their souls to you without realizing what they have done. The novelist is

merely the channel through which their spirit speaks to your spirit. He has effaced himself, completely, utterly.

And so with "The Village Stepantchikovo", the story means nothing unless first of all the characters live vividly. Chief of them is Foma Fomitch Opiskin, a man of good birth but fallen fortune who has been attached to the household of an old general as a kind of companion. At the general's death, he stays on, serving the widow similarly. Little by little, he has gained almost complete mastery over the entire household and estate, including not only the widow but the general's son as well, Colonel Yegor Ilyitch Rostanieff. This power he uses to worry even the servants and the peasants in the field by compelling them to learn French and study foreign manners and customs. He is particularly bitter, in his dangerously incomplete education, against Russian literature.

Yegor Ilyitch, the colonel, is a good-hearted but weak-willed fellow who is an easy tool in Foma's hands.

Sergei Alexandrovitch is the colonel's nephew, a young man just home from school who bears the tyranny of the usurper with bad patience.

Stepan Alexandrovitch Bakhcheieff is a neighboring landowner, gruff and puffingly fat, with a temper that rises and falls like a barometer in April. His linen duster suit hangs on him like sails on a ship in a calm, and when he sits down, their generous folds blot out all sense of human form. Although it is no direct

concern of his, he is indignant over the way Foma Fomitch has extended his despotic rule over the colonel's family.

The General's widow is a petulant, unhappy soul surrounded by a sour group of old maids of a similar status to that of Foma.

Tatiana Ivanovna is one of the characters who stamp " The Village Stepantchikovo " as unmistakably Dostoievsky. Wild-eyed and highly strung, she seems always just out of control of her speech and actions, — a lost spirit hunting for its body.

Nastyenka is the governess of the colonel's motherless children, a simple modest girl.

Yevgraph Larionovitch Yezhevikin is Nastyenka's father, also of a status similar to that of Foma, but better natured and weaker and therefore little more than the court fool in his old age.

Sasha is the colonel's daughter, a fresh, vigorous young girl just the opposite of her father. There are other relatives and attendants and servants and peasants.

The first of the seven scenes of the play is in the yard next the blacksmith shop on the estate of Bakhcheieff. In a broken-down coach a peasant from one of the villages, which Yegor Ilyitch proposes to give to Foma, is found just recovering from a spree which he had begun in an effort to forget Foma's torments. Bakhcheieff orders him from the premises and turns to see a young man who proves to be Sergei Alexandrovitch, just home from school. The elder

man in vehement mouthfuls explodes with the various details of Foma's misrule and the colonel's helplessness. The next scene brings Sergei and his uncle, the colonel, together to discuss the boy's return. Yegor Ilyitch has sent for Sergei to come home and marry Nastyenka, but meanwhile he has fallen in love with her himself.

Tea at the colonel's is the third scene. It seems more like tea at Foma's, for the entire family is gathered at the table with only the large easy chair at its head awaiting the coming of the despot. The room is one of those sombre affairs which the middle nineteenth century produced in every country. Into it the colonel brings his nephew to introduce him to the family circle. The task proves to be an awkward one, for the mother of the colonel is hostile, the old maids follow suit, the boy's own sister has to control her feelings strictly and Tatiana makes a scene such as only a queer character in Dostoievsky can make. A few moments later, Tatiana creates still more of a disturbance by casually taking a rose from a vase, throwing it at Sergei and then madly dashing from the room.

While waiting for Foma, the colonel is unable to avoid the subject which creates all the family troubles and begins discussing the usurper. He says that he never feels as if he were in his own home and he wouldn't be here now if it were not for Sergei. In reply, his mother strikes back, defending Foma. Sasha in turn comes to the defense of her father and

says it is quite time to speak out. Foma Fomitch is a fool. Her father is completely in his hands, and if things go as they have been going, he will have all the villages on the estate in his control. The colonel's mother faints in her chair and there is a general uproar until Foma is announced, when they all settle down to await the triumphal entry.

Foma has been teasing one of the boys of the family, Falalei, and he continues the process after he has reached the table, neglecting his tea and refusing to be introduced to Sergei in order to ask silly questions of the worried and sobbing youngster. This pastime he merges into a violent attack on Russian writers, and he easily gets the better of the colonel when the latter tries to oppose him, for he really is well read and has a quick tongue. When he humiliates Gavrila, an old servant, it is too much for Sergei, and the young man loses his patience for the first time, calling Foma a drunken fool. White with rage, Foma has to be held back to keep him from assaulting Sergei, and with him at the head the entire family dashes madly from the room.

Scenes follow in which Sergei finds that his uncle was as indecisive in the matter of marrying him to Nastyenka as he is in his attitude toward Foma. Nastyenka is not in love with either Sergei or his uncle. While they are talking, a quarrel is heard in another room and the colonel enters in a towering rage, declaring that either he or Foma has to leave the house. Foma himself soon enters and the colonel, somewhat

From Theatre Arts Magazine

A CORNER IN THE OLD KREMLIN PALACE, A SCENE FROM ACT V OF COUNT ALEXEI TOLSTOY'S "TSAR FYODOR IVANOVITCH"

From Theatre Arts Magazine

A SCENE FROM ACT III, "THE WASTE," IN MAXIM GORKY'S "THE LOWER DEPTHS"

FROM REGAL SPLENDOR TO RAGGED MISERY AT THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE

Photograph by the Author; from Theatre Arts Magazine

THE LOBBY OF THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE, TEMPTING PROMENADE FOR THE VISITOR DURING INTERMISSIONS, WITH PANELED PANORAMA OF PLAYWRIGHTS OF ALL COUNTRIES AND PAST PRODUCTIONS OF THE THEATRE

subsiding, offers the elder man fifteen thousand rubles to leave. Foma, however, turns this into an insult, spits on the money and scatters it all over the floor. Yegor now yields once more and in reparation for his insult agrees to repeat phrase by phrase after Foma this speech: "Your Majesty, I am delighted at last to have an opportunity to ask pardon before you, because at first I did not know the soul of Your Majesty. I can assure Your Majesty that never in future will I do anything of the sort again." Few scenes in all Dostoievsky show forth human nature acting more completely under unconscious impulse.

The last scene is the most astonishing in its ensemble and the most dramatic in its contrasts. It takes place in the great parlor at the colonel's. Foma has determined to leave, or at least to pretend to leave. You can not be quite sure, for possibly he is not quite sure himself. He is urged to remain by the colonel but turns on the latter and casts insinuations on him and Nastyenka. Yegor Ilyitch listens to him awhile in peace and then, taking him by the collar, hurls him bodily through the glass door out into a terrific thunderstorm, which is playing a vigorous accompaniment to the storm within. There is endless weeping and wailing until the outcast king returns from the ditch where his horses threw him. He has become penitent, however, and at Yegor's demand he asks Nastyenka's pardon. Rising from his chair, Foma joins their hands and blesses them, and the play closes with them all around the bread and the candles and the icon.

A family has achieved happiness through misfortune, peace through discord and self-respect through humiliation.

"The Village Stepantchikovo" is not a play in the limited sense of the word. The Art Theatre realizes that and simply groups the seven scenes without calling those groups acts. Then, too, realizing that emphasis on the characters and not on the story is the secret of understanding Dostoievsky, it has adopted a unique device in the programme, for first of all in bold type the name of the actor is printed and afterwards, in parentheses, the name of the rôle he plays. The Moscow Art Theatre, with its strict rule of the impersonal in art, its absolute refusal to permit curtain calls, its prompt smothering of all applause, is the last theatre in the world to attract attention to the actor's name and personality without a strong and definite purpose. That purpose I interpret as an attempt to make the individuals peopling Dostoievsky's pages stand out and live as in life. For the four hours of the play, the actors *are* these characters. To print their names prominently, therefore, is to reduce for the spectator the number of steps by which his mind grasps this fact.

Moskvin as Foma, Massalitinoff as the colonel and Gribunin as the gruff Bakhcheieff bear the chief burden of the acting. It is the ensemble, however, the ensemble that only the Moscow Art Theatre knows how to attain without a sense of fuss and effort, which

knits these and many other interesting individual pieces of acting into a close-woven design.

To see such a production at any time, anywhere, is to stand almost in awe. To see it now in Russia and to know that it was brought to life in a Russia spent and wearied with war — to see it now in Russia, still presented with all the calm dignity that is Dostoievsky, even though the Theatre Square a few blocks away is covered with blood-stained snow, and even though there may be many in the audience and on the stage who are actually hungry — that is to know the real Russia, the Russia of which Dostoievsky wrote so that the world might know the heights and the depths which his people had found in the human spirit.

CHAPTER VI

The Studios of the Moscow Art Theatre

The Moscow Art Theatre is not taking any chances with the insecurity of fame after death. It does not propose to die at all. And so, under the guidance of its first artist, the stalwart, snow-white, sunny Stanislavsky, and in the prime of its first generation, it is writing off in advance the inevitable passing of that generation by training up a new one to take its place. Originally in its school and now for five years in its First and Second Studios, the world's first theatre is preparing to perpetuate itself and to insure Russia's dramatic future.

The idea of a school of acting in connection with a theatre is not very new, especially in continental Europe where the playhouses are institutional and the actors rarely stray from the ancestral dressing rooms. That is the way Stanislavsky began years ago to recruit new blood for the Moscow Art Theatre. But about the time the war denied us our artistic and esthetic bulletins from Russia, Stanislavsky founded the First Studio and a year or two later the Second, — genuine theatres open to the public, with homes of their own and their own repertories. When I reached Moscow, prepared to record the swan song of the Russian

Theatre under the Revolution, I found the swan had no intention to sing and that these two lusty children of the Art Theatre in particular were laying and hatching their plans as if there were no such thing as revolution in Russia and war in the world. Under a tense and straitened economy, the parent institution, like the state-endowed theatres and many others, has to be content with revivals from its rich and varied repertory, but the Studios seem to take delight in overcoming odds and adding to the chronicle of their accomplishments. Their tickets, sold by lot to a clamoring multitude like those of the Art Theatre, are gone days in advance of the performance, so that if the guns start barking unexpectedly about curtain time too near the entrance, the box office has a Chinese puzzle to solve in exchanging the unused coupons for a later performance.

I had not been in Moscow many days when I found that Stanislavsky was really anxious lest I pack up under the pressure of war and separate peace and the Terror and go home without seeing the Studios. I would see the Art Theatre itself, of course, — the plays of Tchehoff and Gorky and the rest. But the Studios, the creatures of his elder fancy, — here centered his pride and his affection. Yet, as you go and come in Moscow, there is no undue emphasis on their existence, no untoward *réclame*. Their fixtures are listed modestly at the bottom of the Art Theatre posters. I know many people in Moscow who have never sat in their tiny audience rooms, some who have scarcely heard of them. They exist primarily for the young

actors, to prepare them for the exacting duties of the parent stage. But a theatre is not a theatre unless it has an audience. And so the audience, the right kind of an audience, appreciative but exacting, is gathered in this quiet way. I can not help contrasting the cordial dignity of Moscow with the heat and the fuss and the plumage with which we drum up an audience for our theatres similarly Little.

Although the Studio Theatres are as self-sufficient as a short story, their personnel fits closely into the schedule of the Art Theatre, for which and by which they exist. There is hardly a play at headquarters in Kamergersky Pereulok without some of the young men and women of the Studios in its cast. The minor rôles fall to them in preparation for the greater ones to come. But the relationship is not altogether one-sided, for occasionally the elders step down from their heights to act with the novices, thus giving point and purpose and perspective to the Studio production and a potent example by contact for the players themselves. While I was in Moscow, still another purpose was found for the First Studio when Leonidoff, one of the leading members of the parent company, after a serious illness resumed acting in the Studio until he had fully regained his strength.

It is well for the makers of Little Theatres in Moscow that Russian architecture is ample and generous in its dimensions. All that is needed to construct an auditorium and a stage is to take some private mansion which has outworn its glory or an abandoned club

or office quarters, extend the passageway between two rooms to the width of a proscenium arch, equip one of the rooms for the audience and the other for the actors and start rehearsals. That has been the genesis of more than one theatre in Moscow, and it is the present estate of the two Studio Theatres of the Art Theatre. The First Studio is housed in the commodious second floor of such a structure on the north side of Skobelieff Square, about two blocks up the Tverskaya from the parent stage, while the Second Studio, younger and less pretentious and partaking more of the nature of a school, is encamped across the city in Miliutinsky Pereulok near the Telephone Building. Neither auditorium seats more than one hundred and fifty guests, and the refreshment and promenade parlors, while small, are commodious for that number. There is so little of the aspect and circumstance of a theatre about them that you feel as if you were attending a performance in a private home.

Fulfilling the function of a school, the Studios are organized with a view to training their members as widely and as practically as possible in the various crafts of the art of the theatre. Their public performances are only a part of that routine, not an end in themselves. On no other basis, of course, could they exhibit so rich a repertory to so small an audience. Both Studios are under the personal supervision of Stanislavsky, but he works through a corps of young men and old from the staff of the Art Theatre who have demonstrated their fitness to train and advise the

candidates for the parent stage. Stahovitch, a member of the Direction of the Art Theatre and a former colonel in the Russian army, is particularly entrusted with the Second Studio with Yevgeny Kaluzhsky, a fine spirited young man, and his eager wife as the active tutors and guides for the enthusiastic boys and girls in the ranks of the beginners. Lazarieff, — detailed by Stanislavsky to look after my personal needs, — and Sushkyevitch, Bolyeslavsky and Pavloff, — these are a few of the preceptors who lead the players of the First Studio to their goal by acting, producing, advising and administering with those of less experience.

Of the productions at the First Studio, by far the most successful is " Twelfth Night ", the most truly Tudor " Twelfth Night " I have ever seen in any country. Usually the Studios follow the precept of the Art Theatre by the use of a vividly spiritualized realism as their dramatic method. Here, however, to the great joy of Stanislavsky who sat near me at the dress rehearsal, the young people unfolded their Shakespeare in a series of simple, suggestive scenes, fixing the locale by a bit of furniture or tapestry or garden wall in one corner, while the rest of the stage was hung with unobtrusive curtains. To make the progress of the play continuous, these curtains swung alternately to the right and the left, and behind them the suggestive bits of the following scene were set with a quietness unnatural to one used to the alert methods of our scene shifters.

Borakchieff, Moscow

CALEB PLUMMER'S TOY SHOP IN ACT II OF "THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH," AT THE FIRST STUDIO OF THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE. TCHEHOFF AS PLUMMER; SOLOVYOVA AS BERTHA; AND VAKHTANGOFF AS TACKLETON

ACT I, SCENE 5—OLIVIA: "LOOK YOU, SIR, SUCH A ONE I WAS THIS PRESENT: IS'T NOT WELL DONE?"

Baklanova as Olivia, and Suhatcheva as Viola.

Borakchieff, Moscow

ACT IV, SCENE 1—OLIVIA: "HOLD, TOBY; ON THY LIFE, I CHARGE THEE, HOLD!"

"TWELFTH NIGHT" AT THE FIRST STUDIO OF THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE

The Russians are not more guiltless than other nations in their rearrangement of the original text of Shakespeare. By the simplicity of its staging, however, the Studio is able to use most of the text, even if its method does involve frequent displacement of the order of the scenes. Intimacy is the result of a stage on the same level with the front row of chairs in the audience and less than two yards distant, but it is an impersonal intimacy because the actors never let themselves become aware of the audience. Even when as in one scene they step off the ground cloth, which alone marks the stage, and use the normal exit from the auditorium and the foyer as a continuation of a street scene, they are in another world.

"Twelfth Night" at the First Studio is presented in thirteen episodes or "pictures." The first is at Orsino's palace; the right corner of the stage discloses a drapery of Renaissance tapestries which fall carelessly over a simple throne. To the left is the unobtrusive blue curtain which swings fanlike to the right on a movable pivot at the back centre to reveal the second scene, a bit of seashore (Act II, Scene 1 of the original text). Illusion in the Russian theatre is not precluded by staring exit lights; a tiny gleam serves the purposes of safety. The glow of a beach fire, illuminating the faces of Sebastian and Antonio, is sufficient, therefore, with Shakespeare's words to recreate the night and the sands and the inky waves beyond. At the right again for the corresponding scene of Viola's rescue, a cave seems to open out to a vista

of dimly moonlit water. All the while, the tapestries of the first scene are undisturbed in this shadowy picture, and with full light once more they are restored for the fourth scene at the Duke's palace.

A secluded corner at Olivia's is the fifth scene in both the Studio and the original text, a study in the delicate tracery of carved lattice work and mullioned windows. The costumes are in like mood: lace cap and latticed sleeves and bodice of red velvet for Maria; white ruff under olive green velvet and a single pearl on the forehead for Olivia; black velvet robe and cap and a sweeping purple feather for Viola; orange cape cut fantastically for Sir Toby, with a fat orange feather in his hat; and black doublet edged with white and offset by a single large brooch for Malvolio. Another scene at the Duke's follows at the right (Act II, Scene 4 of the original), before the first intermission.

The second group of episodes at the Studio begins outside the entrance to Olivia's home, the seventh scene in order and the third of Act I of the original text. A single heavy door with the upper half crossbarred, a bench and a lamp post fix the locale. The enveloping curtain, swung farther to the left than before, is dimly seen as Maria, candle in hand, peers through the door, chides the unsteady knights, Toby and Andrew, and finally admits them. The logic of this transposition of the text is evident in the next scene, at the right, the third of Act II, where the revelry with Feste's assistance is continued in Olivia's cellar until Malvolio falls down the steps at the extreme right in a sawed-off

night dress with the protest, "My masters, are you mad?" The grotesque humors of the scene, such as the wedging of Malvolio in an open barrel and driving him off upstairs, tractor-fashion, are not only excusable but commendable in the spontaneity and gusto with which they are introduced. After a short street scene, comes the episode in Olivia's garden, for which almost the entire stage is used. A low wall at the left and the back, with robes thrown over it to break its strict lines, terminates at the right in an arched passageway into the house with columns of the same carved lattice work as in the fifth scene.

The second intermission is followed by Malvolio's humiliation before Olivia in another corner of the garden. A portion of the same wall is visible, but the entire left angle of the stage is given up to a raised platform with a covered passageway behind it in which Malvolio disports himself in the presence of his astonished mistress. In no scene, however, is the Studio's method better unfolded or more thoroughly justified than in the setting wherein the several street scenes are played. Nothing but the dark blue curtains clothe the stage except for a single window frame near the centre fixing the corner of Olivia's home. Curtains lead the winding street back out of sight at the right; curtains carry the same street past the house and out into the foyer at the left. Here are played the ludicrous preparations for the duel; the fight itself, with the unmilitant combatants struggling to avoid each other and the voices of Viola and Sir Andrew echoing

distantly from the two ends of the street in the farthest premises of the theatre; the intrusion of Sebastian in the place of Viola; and Olivia's interruption at the window with "Hold, Toby; on thy life, I charge thee, hold!" Here, too, the Studio interpolates an eloquent bit of dumb show when, to the accompaniment of the organ strains of the wedding inside, the Duke and his retainers pass by, ground their lanterns and listen for a moment in disappointed revery. Back of the curtains, meanwhile, the entire stage has been set richly but simply for the final scene of the reunion of brother and sister.

"Twelfth Night" at the Studio fulfills its Elizabethan character not only by the simplicity of its staging, but also by a rare combination of taste and refinement with gusto and hearty rowdyism. Too often in the past, the comedy has been over-refined by blunting the lusty good humors of Toby and his crew; or if those humors have been unreined, their commonness has spread through the entire production. But under Stanislavsky, the two moods, equally typical of Tudor demeanor, receive their just emphasis in a deft blending which reconstitutes the age of Shakespeare's England.

It is good, too, to see "Twelfth Night" without a Viola whose importance is overdrawn to make an actor's holiday for a jealous star. There is a hint of precocity in Suhatcheva's playing both the rôles of Viola and Sebastian, but the illusion of the comedy is the gainer thereby. If any one actor in the unified ensemble stands out above the rest, it is Kolin as Mal-

volio, — not through artificial emphasis on the rôle but through his abundant insight into the heart of the character and his astonishing brilliance in conveying to others the picture he has conceived. The grotesque nature of this conception is vividly announced in the actor's masterly make-up wherein the lines all seem to work toward the centre of his face, but by the same device the actor denotes Malvolio's tragic self-occupation. In him the play's two rhythms of the grotesque and the refined meet and fuse, and I know of no actor in our time who has understood so well this essential function of the character.

A similarly keen appreciation and understanding of another bit of England marks the earliest production of the First Studio, a dramatized version of "The Cricket on the Hearth" of Charles Dickens. In the dancing shadows of a fireplace at the right before the curtain, Lazarieff, impersonating the author, reads the quaint introduction to the tale. As the light of the hearth gradually fades, the interior of the little cottage of the Peerybingles is disclosed on the stage, with the wash on the line, the cradle by the fire and Dot — a very demure, diminutive Dot in the person of the trim Durasova — waiting for her John. Hmara makes a great-hearted elderly boy of the master, halting his repast with a chunk of food in one cheek to talk to his lady, — too hearty and too explosive at times for a Briton, but the fault is forgivable in its contagious geniality. A perfect riot of a toy shop is the second scene in Caleb Plummer's home, and the third, too,

from a slightly different angle. The fourth scene, or the third act, as the Studio presents the play, returns to the hearthplace of the Peerybingles with a rush of honest joy for the *dénouement.* Imperceptibly, the music of the dance blends into the chirrup of the cricket, and as the lights grow dimmer the author in his chair in the firelit shadows before the curtain brings the tale to a close.

Other plays, other methods. Russian farce, Russian satire, Russian melodrama and Russian tragedy are grouped in a single bill of short plays by Tchehoff: "The Proposal", "Concerning the Harm of Tobacco", "The Witch" and "The Swan Song." Herman Heijermans' "The Loss of 'The Hope'", played in America by Ellen Terry as "The Good Hope", is as Dutch as a dike in the Studio production, with a third act played with such stark simplicity and sincerity that it recalls Synge's "Riders to the Sea." And Henning Berger's "The Deluge", although the least satisfactory item in the repertory, has numerous American insights. It is remarkable how these Russians know more about every other country on earth than all the others put together know about them!

Sometimes the proportion of Studio players on the stage of the Art Theatre itself is so great that it seems as if the day of the younger generation had come already. "The Blue Bird" is now almost altogether in Studio keeping. And the Pushkin programme, consisting of the very brief and very intense episode, "The Festival in the Time of the Plague", and the longer

version of the Don Juan legend, " The Stone Guest ", is likewise almost altogether the product of the Studios, with the exception of Katchaloff as Juan and Germanova as Doña Anna in the latter tragedy. It seems more fitting, therefore, to consider it in connection with the other work of the Studios, especially since the outstanding moment of the programme is Baklanova's brilliant performance of Laura in " The Stone Guest."

The shorter play is adapted from a longer English original, Wilson's " The City of the Plague ", to which Pushkin has added the songs and the toasts in his own inimitable poetry. Its scene is in London in the days of the Black Death, and with its terrifying picture of a group of young people trying to drown in revelry their horror of an overhanging doom, it has a portentous significance in Russia to-day, although the Art Theatre's revival of the play dates back to the season of 1914–1915.

" The Stone Guest " was written in the same year, 1830, the thirty-first of the greatest Russian poet's brief thirty-eight. It is faithfully Spanish in atmosphere and episodic in construction, — a series of brief dramatic narratives with Don Juan as connecting link, each episode cutting clean to the heart of a given psychological situation and laying bare by a few swift strokes, after the manner later used by Browning, the hearts and the motives of the leading characters. Striking and eloquent work was to be expected of Katchaloff and Germanova, and they fulfill expectations with a fine romantic curve held in check by the

dignity and the reserve and the poise which they have learned in their association with the realistic rôles which make up most of the Art Theatre's repertory. To see their mature standard attained at one stroke by the youthful Baklanova in the rôle of Laura brings the thrill that the theatre will always hold for those who know its power to reveal new and unsuspected talent and genius but who never cease to wonder when it appears. Starting with the difficult scene among her admirers and her song with the sigh for a smouldering love as its final note, this young girl draws a picture of a woman who has known life through and through. And she draws it with such economy of strokes, such deep and trenchant strokes, such passionate power, such conviction and such poignancy that she has already earned her right to graduation from the Studio to the parent stage. For both of the Pushkin plays, scenery of intensely expressive character has been designed by Alexander Benois, known to us by his settings for the Diagileff Ballet.

Even more interesting from a human standpoint than these finished and mature players of the First Studio are the enthusiastic children of the Second Studio. Their theatre is very young and they have made only a single public production, "The Green Ring", although they had another ready for disclosure when I left Moscow. The Second Studio is more apparently a school than the First, and its ranks are full of eager youngsters from twelve to sixteen years of age. Only two or three performances are given each week, for

many of the children are students in other schools as well. The burden on each is further relieved and rivalry is introduced into their work by casting several players for every rôle and alternating their performances. Artistically, however, there has been no attempt to ease their tasks, for their plays are deliberately chosen in order to crowd as many characters as possible on the stage in a given scene. Stanislavsky is determined that his pupils shall learn thoroughly the difficult art of ensemble and he pushes them on the stage to sink or swim!

Out of the Studios already has come a rich harvest of ability of the first rank. Kolin and Baklanova from the First Studio loom as the leaders of the coming generation. And so does Tchehoff, whose illness kept him from my sight, — nephew of the playwright, and a gaunt, brooding soul, weighed down by Russia's sorrows but a supreme artist through it all. Somehow it is difficult to see how Baklanova's trenchant feeling and colorful methods will find full outlet in the restrained realism of the Art Theatre. But it may be that such as she will instil into it new life when it has run its course in its present mood. Others who are destined to lead are the antic Smuishlyaieff, who plays Sir Andrew with mincing subtlety in "Twelfth Night"; Bolyeslavsky, the turbulent Sir Toby of the same production; Ghiatsintova, a demure but sprightly Maria to their more downright clowns; Solovyova and Suhatcheva and Durasova. For the most part, the Second Studio does not yet indicate its hidden promise,

although a slender wisp of a girl, Tarasova, still well under twenty, displays a keen sense of the theatre and has won the unhesitating commendation of Stanislavsky.

In the hands of such as these, the future of the Moscow Art Theatre and the Russian stage is secure. A new generation stands ready at the door, trained to know their opportunities and their responsibilities in the days when the Russian theatre shall complete its patient vigil over the past as a light and a vision in troubled times, and turn once more to the creation of new visions and new beauty.

CHAPTER VII

The Russian Ballet in Its Own Home

Of all the Russian arts, the Ballet has had its hopes lifted the highest and dashed the lowest by the Revolution. More than any of the other arts, more even than literature, it was bound by the conventions of the old régime. More than any of the others, it rejoiced over its new freedom and for a few dizzy months made plans and dreamed dreams such as only an enthusiastic Russian can dream. More than any of the others, it drew its life blood from the support of the State — from the Tsar of old, from the free Russian Republic now. And so more than any of the others it suffered when the new State, hard pressed by enemies within and without, found itself unable to devote to the Ballet the equivalent of the vast subsidies of former years.

The Russian Ballet was inextricably woven into the fabric of the autocracy, a bright and cheering thread in that sombre texture of fear and gloom and deceit and oppression. Born of the free and boundless Russian spirit, it had been corralled and hedged in just as the other manifestations of the eager Russian imagination had been smothered and repressed. To the reactionary curse of his ancient court, the Tsar had bound it by financial ties which were at the same time both gener-

ous and miserly. No matter how extravagant were its demands on the imperial purse strings, these demands were always met. Two of the most imposing playhouses in the world were devoted to it and to the Russian Opera as their exclusive homes, — the Marinsky in Petrograd and the Great Imperial Theatre, now the Great State Theatre, in Moscow. Hundreds of boys and girls were trained in the Imperial Ballet Schools for ten to fifteen years with the clear understanding that only a handful of them would ever justify the time and the expense lavished on their education. But while the Tsar had nurtured the Ballet with his financial support, he had stifled its normal growth spiritually by an artistic conservatism which seems to have been inevitably interwoven with political reaction and which dulled and stunted Russian art wherever it exercised control. In the mind of the court, the Ballet was a thing of show, a Metropolitan horseshoe, a source of vulgar pride, a part of the trappings of royalty whereby the sins of royalty masked some of their most hideous aspects. And yet, in the face of this incubus, the Russian spirit was not to be denied. For generations, the genius of Russia had welcomed even this circumscribed channel. The composers of Russia had contrived their harmonies for it. The artists of Russia had painted its scenery. The ballerinas of Russia had refused the offers of the world in order to cling to its shelter and to their beloved Russia.

The Revolution meant an end to all these restrictions! The Ballet was to be free in free Russia! All

THE GREAT STATE THEATRE, MOSCOW

Photographs by the Author

THE MARINSKY THEATRE, PETROGRAD

THE TWO HOMES OF THE RUSSIAN BALLET AND OPERA

Photograph by Gorsky, Balletmaster, Moscow

(From left to right)

ANDERSON, KANDAOUROVA AND GORSHKOVA, OF THE BALLET, MOSCOW

of the splendid flowers of its imagination developed beyond the frontiers of Russia were to be brought back home and incorporated into its famished body to fertilize it and bring forth new and undreamed beauty. Stravinsky, known only through some of the independent orchestras, was to be heard for the first time in the home of the Ballet. Bakst and his madly colored scenery were to be brought back from Paris and London and America. The short, intensely dramatic ballets which made up the repertory of Sergei Diagileff in his wanderings over the earth, were to wave their passionate wand for the first time over Moscow and Petrograd.

Even yet I find it difficult to conceive of Moscow and Petrograd still awaiting their first sight and hearing of Bakst and Stravinsky, of " Petrushka " and " The Fire Bird " and " The Crowning of Spring " and " The Afternoon of a Faun " and " Tamar." Diagileff borrowed his dancers by imperial permission from the Great State Theatre in Moscow and the Marinsky in Petrograd, but he gathered his scenery and his music from Russians living in artistic exile in Paris and Geneva and then revealed his garnered secrets only to the rest of Europe and afterwards to the Americas. The Revolution in March, 1917, promised a welcome home for all this banished beauty, but before the theatres, reborn and eager in their freedom, could complete their plans for expanding their repertories, the economic demoralization of Russia put the cost of production of new plays and ballets beyond even State subsidies.

I suppose it was the discovery that none of these vivid and stimulating forces of the Russian Ballet had ever been tolerated in Russia itself which impressed on me most acutely the spiritual hunger from which the Ballet had suffered under the autocracy. My astonishment grew as I came in contact with the artists who had remained in Russia and had seized the few opportunities for expression which had been grudgingly granted them. Here was Korovin, the equal of Bakst as a master of color and a surer if less fantastic creator of eloquent background. To what use had his genius and his visions been put? Once in a while, the settings for one of the old conventional ballets would wear out. And Korovin was permitted to design their successors, — brilliant and stirring moments all but lost on the antiquated and uninspired score and plot. Here were Prokofieff and Kuroff and other composers of a new generation struggling against a tradition that permitted scarcely anything more modern than Glazunoff's "Raymonda" in the repertory. Here was Mordkin, as virile and impetuous as he was when he helped Pavlova unfold for us first the witchery of the Ballet, his dramatic fire and his creative energy bound down to the precise and lifeless rôles of the outworn classics. Here were a dozen dancers, young and ambitious and restless in a new time, who had never ventured beyond their native stages and who had not felt the lure of the newer impulses but who were ready and straining to devote their ripening powers to a rarer beauty. And last of all, here was a *corps de ballet,* an ensemble, such

as none but Russians had seen, lifting even the antiquated repertory to an undue eminence by the mastery of their technique and the thrill of their impassioned spirit. If Russia has still to see and hear Bakst and Stravinsky, the rest of the world has still to experience the excitement stirred by the ensemble of the Russian Ballet in its own home!

The home of the Ballet, as I have said, is not singular. Moscow and Petrograd vied with each other before the war with a rivalry far keener than that between the Boston Opera at its height and the Metropolitan. Rather, the competition and the municipal patriotism it aroused resembled the struggles between our baseball teams. Even then, however, the ancient capital must have outshone the new one on the Neva. Its school produced a more astonishing ensemble. The dancers of the first rank and promise at the Great Imperial Theatre outnumbered those at the Marinsky. It is true, Karsavina usually danced at the latter, but Moscow had Mordkin, and the next eight or ten ballerinas to be named after Karsavina were all daughters of the Kremlin. By the time I reached Russia, war and revolution had only emphasized the leadership of Moscow. Karsavina alone made the Ballet at the Marinsky notable. Then, too, life in Moscow was more endurable, more conducive to the light-hearted spirit of the Ballet, while the Great State Theatre was always a more imposing and fitting home for the art of the dance.

Moscow's Theatre Place, dominated by this solid

pile, is the second centre of the city, ranking next after the great Red Square outside the Kremlin. In one or the other of these concourses, all of the historic gatherings of the city have centered, — all of the revolts, the celebrations, the demonstrations. The windows of Hotel Metropole overlook its gardens and its trolley wires. The age-mottled yellow stone walls of the Small State Theatre flank its eastern side and the Theatre Nezlobina its western edge. Peering down from the north, the huge Ionic columns of the Great State Theatre overshadow everything else. Scarred here and there by the bullets and the shells of Bolsheviki and Junkers, they stand unharmed like a bronze statue peppered with bird shot. The doors opening underneath them lead through the vast corridors and staircases dear to the heart of the architects of the first half of the nineteenth century, while the shallow horseshoe balconies and galleries rising six or seven to the roof betray the same ancestry. It certainly is not distinctively Russian. Nor is there anything of the "new theatre" in it. Realism would be impossible with its stage as big as all outdoors and its auditorium seating almost five thousand. But it is instinct with the spirit of the theatre, it is a theatrical theatre; and inasmuch as the Ballet is perhaps the most theatrical of all the arts of the theatre, the Moscow home of the Russian Ballet is as it should be.

The first evidence I had that all was not going as well with the Ballet as the Revolution had promised, came the week the theatre reopened after the November

upheaval. Sobinoff, Russia's leading tenor with a voice sweeter and better trained than Caruso's and almost as powerful, was the *kommissar* or *régisseur,* elected by the artists of the theatre after the manner of all delegated authority in democratic Russia. But Sobinoff was singing in Petrograd just then. I was unaware of his absence and I couldn't understand why my letter to him had gone unanswered. Everywhere else, the doors had opened for me most graciously. It may have been a case of stubborn American honor, but I was determined not to pay to see the Ballet after all the other theatres had made me their winter's guest. Twenty minutes before the curtain no reply had arrived, and I suddenly grabbed a young Russian friend by the arm.

"Are you game to talk Russian for me?" I asked him. "If you are, we'll storm the place and be Bolsheviki ourselves." He assented, for he hadn't been educated in England for nothing, though he hadn't quite the assurance of an American collegian. The gruff old watchdog at the stage door was our first ogre. He stood his ground until Bulgakoff, one of the artists' staff who had managed Gertrude Hoffman's Russo-American *tournée* a dozen years ago, came through the passageway and with a word cleared the path for us to an inner office. Thence, our decisive and vigorous methods sufficed to carry us by way of the stage to Sobinoff's box, a canopied retreat with great gilt chairs reserved for court dignitaries in an elder time.

A week passed and a new ballet was announced.

Sobinoff was still in Petrograd. Every one was in command and no one was in command. My efforts to establish diplomatic relations with the Ballet were fruitless. But the watchdog at the stage door had not seen us ejected at the tip of a Russian boot on our first visit, and so our ruse succeeded a second time and a third. Such a footing, though, was too precarious for comfort. And so I accepted the cordial offer of assistance from Boris Maitoff, a devoted connoisseur of the Ballet whom I had met in Sobinoff's box. One of his ancestors had come to Russia from England a century ago, and he himself had spent a year in Texas buying cotton and winning a charming American wife. In all my winter's research, no one was more tireless in helping me to meet and talk with the leaders of the Russian theatre than Maitoff.

Through Maitoff I finally arranged with Elena Constantina, Sobinoff's secretary, to see the holiday repertory of the Ballet, and all in regular form with a very official looking pass. One afternoon the brother of my original fellow-raider and I had penetrated as far as the stage on the pass, but the door into the box was still locked. We roamed around among the scenery and the gathering chiffon of the corps and then out in front of the curtain. There was our box, just a good half-leap from the stage. We were early and there was hardly any one in the auditorium. I overcame my companion's scruples and we clambered up to our seats. But we hadn't counted on the watchdog of this particular portion of the theatre, and when we emerged

From Kenneth Macgowan's "The Theatre of Tomorrow"—Boni and Liveright

NICOLAS ROERICH'S DESIGN FOR THE POLOVTSIAN CAMP IN BORODIN'S OPERA, "PRINCE IGOR," USED BY DIAGILEFF FOR THE BALLET FROM THE OPERA

from the box to buy a programme he was up the stairs at a leap and demanding our pass. Law and order might vanish everywhere else but this particular sentry of the old régime was faithful! Unfortunately, the pass had been made out by mistake for one instead of for myself and my interpreter. One of us had to leave! Of course, neither of us did, but it took an intricate circuit through winding corridors, a deal of waiting and the loss of the overture to "The Sleeping Beauty" before our *shveytsar* nemesis was satisfied by the inadvertent nod of a friend of Sobinoff's. Toward the end of the winter, though, Sobinoff gave up in despair under the heckling of the Soviet and I had to seek new alliances. After numerous negotiations, which were not worth the effort in money but which had become a matter of stubborn pride, I finally made arrangements with that august body of the proletariat itself whereby I was to have an entire red silk box and all its gilt chairs to myself whenever I wished it! But the peace had been signed; Moscow was becoming day by day a less pleasant and secure habitation; an endless series of political wrangling without much purpose or much result loomed up before me, and the following week I packed my photographs and my memories and started on the long trail home.

Of the ballets visible in Moscow under the Revolution, those of Tchaikovsky were easily preëminent. In them none of the passion and the sensuousness and the dramatic fire of "Tamar" and "Sheherazade" and "Petrushka" of the Diagileff repertory. "The

Sleeping Beauty" and "Swan Lake" are simply the conservative classic ballet, but they are the height of that ballet, built up of prettiness, naïve fairy narrative and generous infusions of what some one has called "absolute dancing", dancing of the classic steps for their own sake, devoid of dramatic significance. I was distinctly surprised to find that the Russian public still considers this the ideal aspect of the Ballet. You might think yourself in La Scala in Milan watching a breathless audience follow a singer to her high note and then go mad with applause, for that is what happens with the great technicians of the dance in Moscow.

Splendidly and terribly imaginative characterization in the Ballet such as that of the weird Nizhinsky is not appreciated at anywhere near its true value. Nizhinsky is one among many in Russia. He has had to go abroad to earn the reward for his supreme imaginative gifts. And unless I am much mistaken, there are several of the younger generation who will have to do the same if they wish to be considered anything more than excellent actors obtruding their inferior gifts in the presence of the superior art of the toe dance. Either the intense choreographic dramas produced by Diagileff are a source of envy, jealousy or suspicion, or else the connoisseurs of the Ballet in Moscow would deliberately prefer the classic to the dramatic ballet if they had to choose between them. Of this I am sure: the dramatic ballet will never descend to mere pantomime in Russia. The insistent and persistent demand for a display of all the intricate technique of the toe dance

will take care of that danger. Wherever the Ballet goes in its experiments under the new freedom, it will carry along with it the technique of its classic era.

The supremacy of the two ballets by Tchaikovsky lies largely in their rich and unified scores. None of the others in the repertory I saw could compare with either in this respect. Some of them, like the ancient "Corsar" and "Don Quixote", are such unconscionable crazy quilts of odds and ends from all the composers since the beginning of time, that my attention was diverted from the action to the anxiety as to what old favorite from the family tune book would jump at me next from the conductor's baton. Surely these creaking gaffers are not the goal which the marvellous structure of the Russian Ballet has been erected to interpret. Neither is "Coppelia" worthy of all the effort bestowed upon it. "Bayaderka", the Hindu ballet by Mincous, is on a higher plane, with a vivid and dramatic though conventional story, and a score that is alert if not greatly interesting. What gives "Bayaderka" distinction are the costumes and the scenery by Korovin, considerably superior to his work for "Corsar" by which he has tried in vain to galvanize Adam's timeworn score into life. Of all the ballets at the Great State Theatre in Moscow, though, perhaps the most characteristically Russian is the fantastic dramatization of the Russian folk-tale, "*Konyok-Gorbunok*", or "The Hump-backed Hobbyhorse." The whimsies of its naïve plot, of Puni's music, and of Korovin's jolly peasant costumes and rustic scenes

combine to make it a happy example of the Ballet in its middle mood.

Moscow and Petrograd are relentless judges of the novice in the Ballet. Skill in technique is the first consideration. Personal charm and beauty are appreciated, but they are strictly subordinated to the fundamentals of performance. Thus it is that the elder dancers hold their rôles and their places in the public affection securely against the youth and the eagerness of the new generation. To win the title of ballerina and the right to dance a leading rôle, one must toil patiently for years in the lesser parts or even in the corps. To be graduated from the school into a minor rôle, skipping service in the corps, is considered the highest tribute to the young dancer. In Petrograd, therefore, Karsavina has reigned supreme, not only because of this loyalty to mature skill but also because few of her younger consorts either there or in Moscow are dangerous rivals. Fokina was absent in Copenhagen and Karaly ill in Finland, and so none of the first ballerinas of the generation of Pavlova and Karsavina was present to dispute the latter's prestige. In Moscow, however, faithfulness to the experienced artist seemed to me to bestow credit out of all proportion to deserts. The Ballet public acknowledged the leadership of Geltser. There is no denying her technique or her boundless spirits, but she left my feelings cold and unkindled. Balashova, too, although many years Geltser's junior, profited in popular esteem and choice of rôles at the expense of several of the younger generation who dis-

played far greater genius but who were still working out their novitiate.

Naturally, even in Russia, the future lies in the lap of this younger generation. For me, however, the present is also in their keeping. It is they who reward the pilgrim to the home of the Ballet with the thrill and the fire which is the secret of the Ballet's greatness. It is they who were missing from Diagileff's ranks, — they and the astonishing corps of Moscow whose absence prevented the Russian Ballet in America from fulfilling all its prospects and its promises. It is they who stand straining on the threshold of a new day, waiting to merge the traditions of the past with the dreams of the future. Anderson, Fyodorova, Krieger and Kandaourova interest me most. All of them are firmly grounded in technique. Each of them expresses herself through a personality that is rich and distinctive, the personality of a genuine artist.

Anderson is marked for the most brilliant future of them all in her native Russia, — Elizabeth Julia Anderson, to give her full name for the benefit of curious America and in order to propitiate a guilty sense of brusqueness at using merely the surname, Russian-fashion. I had seen her as one of the Pearls who dance with Ocean under the sea in " The Hump-backed Hobbyhorse ", in which Kandaourova has the leading rôle. Here is a remarkably proficient young lady, I thought, but I was unprepared for the display of virtuosity and genius she revealed when she danced the title part in Tchaikovsky's " The Sleeping Beauty."

This light-haired, trim, sensitive girl has probably the keenest esthetic of any one in the Ballet in Russia to-day. Certainly she has the finest sense of ballet form since Pavlova. In addition to her technical gifts and her perfect control of them, rivalling that of the greatest dancer of our generation, Anderson has a warmth of personality which Pavlova with her austerity has never been able to bestow on her work. She can never be the Greek goddess as Pavlova can, but she has possibilities in more human parts which her predecessor can not touch.

Of Scandinavian extraction on her paternal side, Anderson has a distinctly light and northern air about her. It was her grandfather who emigrated from Denmark and gave her an un-Russian name and perhaps her shimmering blonde beauty. Her mother, however, was a member of a prominent Moscow merchant's family and to her she probably owes her thoroughly Russian spirit and imagination. In Moscow she was born in 1890 and at the age of nine she entered the Imperial Ballet School. From the very first, she appeared on the stage of the Great Theatre in the parts of elves, gnomes and angels. At the age of sixteen she was graduated from the school with the first degree, which permitted her to forego apprenticeship in the *corps de ballet* and to enter immediately into the rôles of the second leading dancer. In that rank in 1911 and 1912 she danced in London with Karsavina at the Coliseum and with Geltser at the Alhambra. One of the rôles she played in those foreign seasons

was the antic cat in Tchaikovsky's "The Sleeping Beauty." Aside from those brief excursions, she has danced only in Moscow, where she attained her first leading rôle, Aurora in "The Sleeping Beauty", in the season of 1916–1917, and her next, Odetta in Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake", while I was in Moscow. Her forte, she thinks, is the classic ballet, but I am sure that her mastery of the classic technique, like that of Pavlova, will give force and assurance and poise to the dramatic rôles she is destined to play in the newer ballets.

Two things above all please me in an art like the Ballet. One of them is the perfect control of power such as that of Pavlova and Anderson. The other is that superabundance of power and nervous energy which defies all control and literally overflows its containing body in every direction. Of course, there must be technical skill to absorb the bulk of this power or else the exhibition descends to mere animal romping. But it is not unpleasing, especially in extreme youth, to see an artist using twice the force needed to accomplish a given task. I know then that the vital energy is there and that time and experience may bring it under control.

It is this, I think, which interests me most in Krieger, one of the latest additions to the roster of leading ballerinas. I know of no one in the entire course of the Russian Ballet who has her electrical swiftness of movement and lightness of touch. Moscow audiences censure her for the prodigality with which she expends

her energy, but they like her for her superabundance of spirit,—*zhizn* or life, the Russians call it. She is Russian to the core; she has danced nowhere except in Moscow and she doesn't wish to dance anywhere else until she has grounded herself more firmly in her profession.

Krieger comes naturally by her art, for her family has long been connected with the Russian theatre and her father is now one of the leading players at the Theatre Korsha in Moscow. She was born in 1893, entered the Imperial Ballet School in 1904 and was graduated in 1912. Of a somwhat later period in her instruction than Anderson, she has been less influenced by the ambition to rival Pavlova and therefore she is proceeding on her course of development quite independently. Pavlova to her is a name and a reputation rather than an experience, for the greatest dancer had left Russia several years before Krieger completed her period of instruction. Her first leading rôle was in "The Hump-backed Hobbyhorse" in 1915 and her second in "Don Quixote." Almost her entire experience, therefore, has dated since the beginning of the war.

American audiences, if they have the opportunity, will welcome the radiant Kandaourova for her surpassing beauty and the dark, lithe impassioned Fyodorova for her power as an actress. Two dancers could hardly differ more, one from another. Kandaourova appeals placidly but pleasantly to the senses, Fyodorova hotly to the emotions. Both of them have that perfect con-

Saharoff, Moscow

MIHAIL MORDKIN AND MARGARITA FROMAN IN THE BALLET, "AZIADÉ," STAGED BY MORDKIN

Saharoff, Moscow

ZHUKOFF AND MLLE. REYZEN
REIGNING STARS OF THE BALLET AT THE GREAT
STATE THEATRE, MOSCOW

trol of the body which is a prerequisite for the first rank in the Ballet. To this, Kandaourova adds a quick sense of gracefulness and a fairy prettiness, while Fyodorova in addition is probably the ablest delineator of character the Russian Ballet has produced.

Of the others, Margarita Froman has already been to this country with Diagileff and she is now the dancing partner of Mihail Mordkin in his productions independent of the State Theatre. Reyzen has an incisive dark beauty, and Balashova an aristocratic face and great vitality.

Of the men, Mordkin still stands alone. You have only to see him dance the Bacchanale at the Theatre of the Soviet of Workmen's Deputies in Moscow, where he has complete control of all Ballet productions since his disagreement with the Great State Theatre, to realize what made that moment of dance so exciting when he and Pavlova first gave it to America nearly a decade ago. He is still the same Mordkin, tireless, ambitious, impetuous in his eager good-will, his physical powers undimmed, his imagination deepened and broadened.

Mihail Mihailitch — Michael the son of Michael — as his friends know him, is almost as much a tradition among us as Pavlova is in her native Russia. He was a pupil of the Imperial Ballet School of Moscow and served his apprenticeship there and in Petrograd. It is nearly a decade now since he first came to us with Pavlova in the freshness of his early power, danced with her all over America, and then in 1912 after two

seasons with us, suddenly withdrew into the mysterious land from which he sprang. Through a like interval Pavlova has been absent from Russia, a wanderer on the earth, dividing her time between London and Madrid, between New York and Buenos Aires, and all the stops en route. I had to reassure her fellow-citizens, shut off hopelessly from the world by years of war and revolution, that Pavlova still lives and dreams and works and thrills those who crowd into her charmed circle. And now, ever since my return to America, I find that I must recreate the shadowy Mordkin and bear witness that he, too, still lives and dreams and works and thrills great audiences who turn to him for a moment of encouragement under the Terror.

It wasn't long after the Bolshevik Revolution in November, 1917, that I picked up the broken thread of the past and once more held a Mordkin programme in my hand as I sat in the Theatre of the Soviet of Workmen's Deputies in Moscow. "Aziadé" was the ballet, a tale of the Arabian Nights arranged and produced by Mordkin himself, with music by Giutel, a contemporary composer of promise who conducted his own score, and with scenery by Goloff, a Moscow artist of to-day with a keen sense for vivid color. But these details didn't matter. Fate and faith hung on the entrance of the Sheik Usein played by Mordkin. Could he still draw my muscles tense just by the appearance of his magnetic presence on the scene? And so when he doubled the thrill even against the odds of such vaulting expectation and followed it by an amaz-

ing and unsuspected command of dramatic technique working intimately with the technique of the dance, then I knew that here at least was an idol unbroken in iconoclastic Russia. Here was the mature Mordkin, on toward forty, of whom our glimpse a decade ago was not the fulfillment but only the prophecy.

For several years after his return to Russia, Mordkin did not apply too vigorously the energetic precepts he had learned in America. He went to London in 1914, but, back again in Moscow and Petrograd, he danced the rôles assigned him in the conventional ballets which stifled the sedate repertories of the Imperial Theatre. Still, all the time the leaven was working. All the time Mordkin, dancer, longed to be Mordkin, *postanovka,* producer. The first Revolution brought him his opportunity in the summer of 1917. By a more or less peaceful and orderly form of expropriation, the Soviet of Workmen's Deputies in Moscow took over the lease of Zimin's Opera House, a private institution second in importance only to the Great State Theatre. Here for years Zimin had produced Opera and Ballet in rivalry with the Imperial Theatre, welcoming to his stage new works more readily than the conservative institution, much in the manner of Oscar Hammerstein during his tenancy of the Manhattan Opera House in New York. The Soviet assumed all of Zimin's obligations to his singers and his staff and in addition induced Fyodor Kommissarzhevsky, director of one of Moscow's experimental theatres, to produce new operas and Mihail Mordkin to take charge of the Ballet.

Things had reached that pass when I arrived in Moscow. Mordkin still retained his connection with the Great State Theatre of Moscow, although he no longer danced there. In the spring of 1918, even that thread to the past was broken, for his independent methods shocked the staid traditions of the elder institution and he was put outside its ranks. To his own ballet school and his productions at the Theatre of the Soviet he devoted most of his time. The Bolshevik Opera, we called it, for the Soviet insisted on running the front part of the house. Although the seats were numbered, no one could find them, and you fought for your place as you would in the bleachers at the Polo Grounds. The only salvation lay in the fact that no one was admitted during an act and your squatter sovereignty held good that long, at least.

Back stage, however, the Soviet had sense enough to let their appointed directors hold sway. And the contrast in order and efficiency and ensemble suggests that Russia might be a more whole and happy land if she turned everything over to her artists! It was here in this atmosphere of order and freedom that Mordkin, dancer, grew to be Mordkin, producer. Here he brought to life his passionate, vivid tale of Araby, "Aziadé", an intense tragic night under tented canopies, with the triangular design so common in Russian art pushed to a nerve-shattering point in the decorations, and with costumes by contrast made up of sinuous, curving figures. In it he plays the sheik who woos a beautiful captive girl, Aziadé, only to fall by her

hand after she has repulsed him and then feigned affection in order to kill him. Margarita Froman, Mordkin's present partner, is the girl. She is not another Pavlova, but she has grace and personal charm and is an excellent foil for Mordkin's aggressive manner.

Somehow there is less to be said of the other men despite their ability. Zhukoff at the Great Theatre stands head and shoulders above the others in the oncoming generation and plays the rôles formerly assigned to Mordkin with a nice combination of grace and vigor. The classic technique delegates to the man the function of balance wheel, the pivot round which the more spectacular work of his partner is woven, and no one fulfills this duty with more assurance and less obtrusiveness than Zhukoff, although some of the ballerinas prefer to dance with the slender Novikoff or the stalwart Svoboda and some in the audience prefer to see them. Novikoff's form is beyond criticism but he hardly gives the impression of power in reserve that distinguishes such dancers as Mordkin and Bolm and Zhukoff.

No roster of the home guards of the Ballet would be complete without the antic Ryabtseff. To him fall invariably all the clownish rôles. He is kicked and cuffed around like the fools of Shakespeare, and yet on occasion he displays his mastery of the serious technique which is at the base of all the ballet training. No one in Moscow, not even Stanislavsky of the Art Theatre, is so difficult to find or to follow. In addition to his exacting duties at the Great State Theatre, Ryab-

tseff finds time to be the *régisseur* of the Theatre Nezlobina, a dramatic house; the business manager of Youzhny's Variety Theatre, and the director of his own ballet school.

No record is complete, either, without a glimpse of the sensitive artist who has contributed the most imaginative scenic settings to the Ballet in Moscow and Petrograd, — Constantin Alexeievitch Korovin. Born in Moscow in November, 1861, he was graduated from the Academy of Painting there at the age of twenty. Later, at twenty-three, he studied and exhibited in Paris and at twenty-six in London. He is one of the few Russian artists who know America from experience, for at the age of thirty-two he was connected with the Russian exhibit at the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893. On his return to Europe, he had an atelier in Paris where Americans frequently congregated. As a young man he designed the decorations and costumes for a period of eight years at the private theatre and opera of Mamontoff in Moscow. For many years now, he has been the leading artist in the scenic studios of the state-endowed Opera and Ballet.

Despite all his travels and his mastery of his art, Korovin is of an extremely diffident and retiring nature. It was only the day before I left Moscow that I penetrated with some friends to his studio off the Myasnitskaya. The anxious years of war and revolution had told seriously on the artist, and I found him obsessed with a kind of nameless dread, although no

conceivable political or social change could put him in jeopardy. In preparation for a flight which he feared as much as he did the ordeal of remaining in Russia, he had sold off most of his precious canvases. Those that remained he permitted me to photograph to my heart's content, and in addition he thrust into my hands many rare prints of his productions. "You may keep them until I see you again," he said with characteristic Russian faith and simplicity.

In the presence of old friends, however, he lost some of his nervous anxiety and entered into a discussion with boyish zeal. Mid-afternoon, Shaliapin, Russia's and, I think, the world's greatest opera singer, dropped in for a chat. I had heard him in "Boris Godunoff" in Petrograd at the Narodny Dom the month before, and I had yielded more unquestioningly to the actor than to the barytone, for Shaliapin would probably be the greatest living actor if he lost his singing voice to-morrow. In the intimacy of the informal Russian living room, where we sat for hours around the lunch table after Mme. Korovin had cleared away a frugal meal, we listened to Fyodor Ivanovitch — for that is the name by which all Russia knows him, down to the poorest peasant — and his stories. Every inch of his six feet four was instinctive with drama and with indomitable vitality. The future of the Russian theatre is, indeed, dark, but with men of such fineness and strength as these to tide it over to better days, it is not hopeless.

The dreams of the Ballet have been sadly shattered

by the Revolution, but they have not been destroyed. Freed from an oppressive conservatism, the Ballet finds its hands tied anew by the economic demoralization of the country. Subsidies have not ceased, but they have ceased to be sufficient for the Ballet to make any progress. For a while, the proletarian hatred of all the fruitage of the autocracy threatened to engulf the theatre and the opera and the ballet. But wiser counsels prevailed. The leaders of the Bolsheviki have just as much respect as any one else for these proud possessions of the Russian people. They have their own crude and abrupt way of expressing that respect, and endless friction has resulted from the pugnacious disturbance of honored customs, but the salaries of the artists have gone on and the doors have been kept open. In such times as these, however, the meagre funds set aside for upkeep do not suffice for new productions. " Petrushka " was to have been seen for the first time in Russia at the Great State Theatre in Moscow the winter I was there, and that was only one of the hopes lifted and then dashed by the course of the Revolution. The Russian Ballet, like all the other Russian arts, may count itself fortunate if it can hold its ranks together and weather the storm as an institution intact, if it can preserve some semblance of its school and hand on to the artists of less distressing days the beauty of its spirit.

CHAPTER VIII

The Deeper Roots of the Russian Theatre

One of the best of all reasons why the Russian theatre has survived political and even social revolution is that its roots strike deeply and firmly into the past. Its birth, along with the other Russian arts, out of the womb of a people's sorrow helps explain why it persists supreme among modern theatres in spite of the chaos and the anxiety and the bitterness of class struggle. To its spiritual consolation and its honest vision, the nation turns in the days of its deeper sorrow. And yet, rich as it has been in performing this service, it probably would not have borne the shock of the Terror if it had not been grounded for generations in the minds and affections of all Russians.

For us to think of the Russian theatre in terms of generations requires something of a mental wrench. The Moscow Art Theatre we know by rumor and the Russian Ballet by its pleasant dalliance on our shores. But the former was created out of Stanislavsky's dream in our own time, and the latter startled the world only from the moment Isadora Duncan rekindled its flame. The Russian theatre seems to us like the newest theatre in the world. Instead, its genealogy is from Pushkin and Griboyedoff, from Gogol and

Ostrovsky as playwrights and from Motchaloff, tragedian, and Shchepkin, comedian, as players. For a hundred years it has been the secure refuge of Russian genius from the oppression of reaction and autocracy.

The continuation to-day of this elder tradition of the Russian theatre, the flower of these roots, is the Small State Theatre in Moscow, home of the Russian classic drama. Small it is only by comparison with its partner in governmental subsidies, the Great State Theatre, guardian of Opera and the Ballet, for it seats at least a thousand people and its stage is larger than its auditorium. Its age-yellowed exterior stands unobtrusive guard over the east side of the Theatre Place, a stone's throw from the imposing Ionic portico of the Great Theatre. Inside, balustrades and corridors of masonry lead to an interior of red and gold and plush and draperies. Tradition sits down beside you in your seat. Flavor of men and manners of other years crosses the footlights without a shock, for you yourself in the brief interval since you left the anxious turmoil of to-day's out-of-doors have been led back into the mood of other years. I wish we had a single theatre like this for our Shakespeare and for the rest of our less hardy but still picturesque classic drama. The proponents of experiment and the "new theatre" would not be interested in it, but we should then know, as Russia knows, the tenacious virility of the past and the leavening power of tradition.

My host in Moscow, Andrei Yegorovitch Weber, was one of those who believed passionately in these

elder values, and so, though my own inclination carried me oftener to the middle-aged Art Theatre, already settling into its own tradition, and to the youthful theatres of artistic revolt, I was not permitted for long to forget the quiet and unobtrusive dignity of the Small State Theatre. Vladimir Tardoff, too, a newspaper friend with tastes similar to my own, warned me, in my quest for the new and the strange, not to neglect the home of the classic drama.

"There you will find Ostrovsky handed down in unbroken succession from the mid-nineteenth century. With Gogol and Griboyedoff, a still elder tradition is preserved. And there, too, you will see how the Russian has welcomed into his repertory the best of the drama of western Europe, from Molière and Shakespeare down to Ibsen. In the political terminology of to-day, the Small State Theatre stands on the extreme right in matters of art, preserving and guarding, modestly but earnestly, the humanism of the past. And over its affairs, one of the finest spirits in all Russian art to-day presides, Prince Alexander Ivanovitch Sumbatoff."

Accordingly, with Tardoff's card, I sought the prince at home and in the playhouse. The derangement of the theatre's plans by the Bolshevik Revolution made the prince a very busy man and hard to find. It was only after a most cordial correspondence in French that our trails met one evening between the acts in his own private greenroom which opened off his loge. Already he had arranged with the doorkeepers that I

should come at will and sit with my interpreter in the front row of chairs placed in a slight depression between the first row of the parterre and the edge of the apron and denoted the "orchestra", although no musical diversion ever breaks the continuity of a Russian dramatic performance. The seats were not the best in the house, but they were the only ones readily and invariably at his disposal, for the entire auditorium with the exception of this orchestra was often reserved by subscription. And so almost his first words after our meeting were an apology for the arrangements he had made for me.

"It doesn't matter!" I said in all sincerity. "I am at home anywhere in the theatre."

Instantly, his all-enclosing hand reached across the table and gripped mine in earnest sympathy, for he, too, has been at home "anywhere in the theatre" ever since as a boy in the First Gymnasium of Tiflis he was drawn to the stage.

Alexander Ivanovitch is a prince of the Caucasus. He was born September 17, 1857, into one of the oldest families of Georgia on the estate of his mother in the Government of Tula, south of Moscow. He entered the law school of the University of Petrograd in 1877, but immediately on his graduation in 1881 he turned to the stage and joined the company of Brenko's Pushkin Theatre, in Moscow. F. A. Korsh, whose red brick playhouse is still one of the landmarks of Moscow's dramatic life, was just completing his institution at that time, and on the closing of the Pushkin

PRINCE ALEXANDER IVANOVITCH SUMBATOFF (YOUZHIN), DIRECTOR OF THE SMALL STATE THEATRE, MOSCOW

Saharoff, Moscow

PRINCE SUMBATOFF AS SHYLOCK IN "THE MERCHANT OF VENICE"

Fisher, Moscow

A SCENE IN ACT I OF GRIBOYEDOFF'S "THE SORROWS OF THE SPIRIT," AT THE SMALL STATE THEATRE, MOSCOW

Theatre, Sumbatoff joined the ranks of Korsh. The same year he was invited without trial by the *régisseur* Potiehin to the Small Imperial Theatre of Moscow, and there on September 12, 1882, he made his first appearance as Tchatsky in the finest example of classic Russian comedy, Griboyedoff's "*Gore ot Uma.*" And there he has played and perfected his art as comedian and tragedian for thirty-seven years, except when the entire company left Moscow for one of its infrequent guest tours to Petrograd or to the provincial cities or even so far afield as Belgrade, Serbia, in 1900.

As player and playwright, Prince Sumbatoff uses the stage name Youzhin, but he is known and loved throughout Russia by his given name, Alexander Ivanovitch. He began to write for the theatre while he was still a student in the University, and his first play, "The Lightning Rod", was produced with success in 1878 by the Moscow Artistic Circle. His next, "Rustling Leaves", was first played October 14, 1881, at the Small Imperial Theatre in Moscow and the following season at the Alexandrinsky in Petrograd. "Sergei Satiloff" followed in 1883, but although it is published in his works the censor denied it performance. Other plays followed in rapid succession, presented both in Moscow and Petrograd: "The Husband of a Celebrity", 1884; "The Arkazoffs", 1886; "The Chains", 1888; "Tsar Ivan IV", in verse, 1890; and "The Commune of Irin", 1901. He has continued his composition in later years but with less frequency and I have no complete list. His "Night Birds" was in the

repertory of the Small State Theatre during the winter of 1917–1918. A record kept until 1901 showed a total of over six thousand performances of his various plays in the theatres throughout Russia and that sum must have been more than doubled by to-day. Several of his plays have been translated into Polish, Czech, Serbian, German and French. As a playwright, Youzhin has followed in the realistic tradition of Ostrovsky, in whose comedies he has so often appeared at the Small State Theatre. The background of their action is sometimes the life of provincial actors, sometimes that of the impoverished nobility, and sometimes that of the modern Russian merchant.

I asked Alexander Ivanovitch one afternoon in his modest apartment, enriched with rare rugs and hangings from the Caucasus and beyond, what was his favorite rôle in the hundreds he had played, and before I could stop his eager catalogue he had named a dozen out of Shakespeare and Schiller and Hugo. I know he takes great delight in Shylock which I saw him play twice in a finely flavored production of "The Merchant of Venice" staged in the conventional manner. His Jew is one of great dignity and self-command, the embodiment of the hatred and vengeance of an oppressed race. Outward good will and inward revenge gleam alternately from his eyes when he agrees to the bond. His eyes are eloquent, too, after Jessica's flight, — set and glazed as he looks toward the sky with something of the wounded patriarch about him. His finest moments, though, come in the fourth act, as they

should. I have never seen Shylock face his expected triumph more proudly. He stands like a pillar, arms folded, while the doge outlines the case. His knife he removes from the sheath with a jerk, his eyes glitter as he sharpens it, he tests it with a hair from his beard, and then he utters a word of lip prayer before he addresses the court. He is stunned at first by the verdict, but turns with quivering arms for his appeal to the doge, falling forward prostrate at the end. His departure is in silence, head bowed, — a broken man and a truly tragic figure who has appealed to the emotions through the intellect rather than through the emotions direct.

Another rôle that gives him joy is, rather strangely, that of Bolingbroke in Scribe's *"Le Verre d'Eau."* The play is artifice and pasteboard to the last line, but like all Scribe, it is exultingly of the theatre theatrical, and that quality, I suppose, commends it to Youzhin's affection, for there is in him a strain of the old-time actor who loves the theatre for its own sake, with all its strut and fret, regardless of its contact with life.

As a true artist, Youzhin likes to match himself against others, and so at alternate performances of "The Merchant", Ossip Andreievitch Pravdin is the Shylock, making him the personification of individual hatred rather than of racial vengeance as that of Youzhin. Pravdin's service at the Small State Theatre antedates even that of Youzhin, for the fortieth anniversary of that service was celebrated while I was in Moscow. This sharp-eyed, gruff-voiced but kindly old actor and artist made his début in the theatre at Helsingfors,

Finland, in 1869 at the age of twenty. After that, he played comic old men in Tiflis, Kieff and various cities until the great Shumsky discovered him and brought him to Moscow to appear on private stages. On Shumsky's death in 1878, Pravdin followed him at the Small State Theatre, where he has played and taught in the theatre school ever since.

There are many other fine figures in the company at the Small Theatre, bridging several generations of Russian dramatic genius. Yermolova, grande dame of the Russian stage, is accounted its leading actress, though she seldom plays any more. Sadovskaya, eldest scion of a family which compares with the Booths and the Drews and the Barrymores in its service in the Russian theatre, still preserves a keen sense of the droll and the comic and counts those who love her from playgoers of her own advanced age down to the children. Lyeshkovskaya, though a younger actress, is yet of Youzhin's era. Aidaroff is equally able as actor and producer. Yablotchkina and Lyenin — no relative of the Bolshevik premier — are in their prime. Sadovsky III, son of Sadovskaya, and Maximoff are perhaps the most promising of the young men, while the theatre's ablest actresses of the younger generation are Shchepkina, heiress of the traditions of another great acting family, and Gzovskaya.

Only one new production has been made at the Small State Theatre since the Revolution, a double bill including Oscar Wilde's "Salome" and "A Florentine Tragedy" — the former, by the way, wholly missing

the passionate import of the drama while the latter sought out accurately and conveyed vividly the almost Greek simplicity of its sombre story. But, like the Art Theatre and all the other Russian playhouses, the Small Theatre had only to delve into its rich repertory to find old plays that are always new. Ready to the reviving hands of its directors were all the varied dramatic works of that peculiar possession of its storied stage, Alexander Nikolaievitch Ostrovsky, — history, satire and fancy. Equally ready were the plays of Tolstoy, while from western literatures came trooping from the theatre's storehouse the plays of Shakespeare, Molière and Scribe. In addition to the Shakespeare and the Wilde which I have recorded, I saw during the winter of 1917–1918 Ostrovsky's "Wolves and Sheep", "Truth Is Good but Luck Is Better" and "Vassilisa Melientieva"; Lyoff Tolstoy's "The Fruits of Enlightenment"; and Scribe's *"Le Verre d'Eau."* Other engagements prevented me from seeing three of Ostrovsky's masterpieces, "The Thunderstorm", "Frenzied Finance" and "*Voevoda*" and Molière's "The School for Husbands", which were in the season's repertory.

But chief of them all, chief, I am inclined to believe, among the entire range of Russian classic drama, was that fine and sensitive flower of Russian culture, Griboyedoff's *"Gore ot Uma."* If I had seen nothing on Youzhin's stage but the four acts of its tender but searching insight into life, I would have known the secret of the deeper roots of the Russian theatre. The

play's title defies adequate translation into English. "Ill Luck from Sense" it is, literally, but that will never do. "The Woes of Wisdom" someone has called it, with resultant moving picture connotations. The French are more successful, with "*Mal de Trop d'Esprit.*" For myself, I prefer a paraphrase rather than a translation, and I like to call it "The Sorrows of the Spirit", for that seems somehow to convey the mood of the play, a finely balanced adjustment of intellect and sentiment.

In less honest hands than those of Alexander Sergeievitch Griboyedoff, "The Sorrows of the Spirit" would savor of fastidious intellect and false sentiment. Even its artistic honesty might not be proof against the interpretation of artists less serious than Youzhin and his players. In fact, the presence in the ensemble of one of the few pieces of really bad acting I saw in an important rôle in a leading theatre during my entire winter in Russia showed how dependent the play is on the sympathy and understanding and sincerity with which it is presented, for it was this blemish rather than the Art Theatre's superiority in managing the crowded reception scene in the third act which made the younger institution's production of the same play more satisfactory in spite of Youzhin's masterly performance of Famusoff and in spite of the fitness of seeing a play of a century ago in a playhouse of its own era.

The clash of education and cosmopolitan views against the stupidities of daily life in an isolated civilization and the power of the latter to smother and over-

ride the former is the theme of "The Sorrows of the Spirit." Alexander Andreievitch Tchatsky is the young man whose homecoming brings such bitter disillusioning. Before his exit into the world, he had loved Sophia, daughter of Famusoff, a substantial type of higher official in Moscow. On his return, he seeks her out, less in passion, one feels, than from self-respect, only to find that she has forgotten him for the philandering secretary of her father, Moltchalin. He seems unable, however, to accept this plausible incident in a complacent, animal-like existence such as the social leaders of Moscow lived a century ago, and instead of withdrawing immediately to the isolation which his own development has builded round him, he remains to cross verbal swords with Famusoff and his friends, criticising Moscow "where the houses are new and the prejudices ancient", the perpetual balls, the verses inscribed in albums, the celebrities of the English Club, the language "Franco-Nizhni-Novgorodian." Tchatsky only gets himself well disliked for his pains and in the end finds himself charged even with an unbalanced mind. Thus does complacency protect itself from its critics. In the end, after shielding Sophia from scandal at his own expense, he exclaims: "Away from Moscow! I shall never return again. Somewhere in the world I shall try to find a corner for my wounded feelings," and he calls his carriage.

Tchatsky has been seen by those who doubt Russia's moral fibre and constructive power as a kind of Russian Hamlet, the embodiment of an inhibited will power,

national in scope. To the extent that he is faithful to the frequent inability of the Russian to persist practically in an effort to achieve by slow degrees some desired change, there may be a measure of truth in such an interpretation. The whole point of the play is missed, however, if we do not see how Griboyedoff, as artist rather than as propagandist, used Tchatsky for the purpose of laying bare the sophistry and shallowness and complacency of the social fabric of his time. The fact that "The Sorrows of the Spirit" is more highly regarded in Russia to-day than when it was written is proof to me that Russian life has moved far from that period of smug isolation and that the fine ideals of Tchatsky stir a responsive chord in the public mind and heart which will rebuild Russia anew out of her present ruins.

According to Pushkin and other friends of Griboyedoff, Tchatsky is autobiographical in his rôle of critic. The playwright, born January 17, 1795, travelled abroad and was in government service for a while in Persia, meeting his death at Teheran when a mob stormed the embassy February 11, 1829. "The Sorrows of the Spirit" is the single work by which he will be remembered, although he wrote also of the Orient. The idea for the play came to him in 1812 but he did not begin work on it until 1816. Two years later at the age of twenty-three he had completed two acts, but the play was not finished until 1824. It encountered the snares of the censorship from the start. In 1825, two parts of it were printed, but it was not

played, even in a modified form, until 1831, two years after the playwright's death. All of it but a few portions was printed in 1833, but the work in its entirety, both as book and as stage play, had to wait the liberal period of the reign of Tsar Alexander II in 1860.

Two actors — Motchaloff, tragedian, and Shchepkin, comedian — founded the fame and the tradition of the Small State Theatre early in the last century. The present building was not erected until 1841, but their influence had already established the tendencies which were to differentiate the Russian theatre of the nineteenth century from that of western Europe. While English and French stages were still obsessed with the old, false pseudo-classicism of declamation, the theatre in Moscow under the guidance of Motchaloff and Shchepkin had cast aside these artificialities and had created a new art characterized by simplicity, life-likeness and sincerity of execution. Through this movement, the Russian theatre of the nineteenth century linked itself closely with the creators of Russian literature, Pushkin, Gogol, Griboyedoff and Bielinsky; with the Moscow University of the epoch of Granovsky; and finally and mainly with the whole texture of Russian life. This contact with life has never since been lost, for the Russian theatre had entered into life not as an artificial appendage or addition but as a composite part of its organism. Nowhere else in the world to-day, except perhaps in Japan and China, is the theatre so firmly anchored in the habits and the affections of the people as it is in Russia.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Small Theatre reaped the fruits of the instruction of Motchaloff and Shchepkin. The fecund pen of Ostrovsky produced a constant stream of works of the first rank for the use of its artists, and the theatre thrived under this incentive just as the Art Theatre found stimulus and inspiration in the successive works of Anton Tchehoff during its birth years from 1898 to 1904. The company's roster was studded with the names of such masters of the theatre as Sadovsky, Shumsky, Samarin, Zhivokiny, Fedotova, Vassilieva, Miedviedieva and Nikulina. The comedy of manners was their forte, — Ostrovsky first, and then western European comedy with Molière at its head. They used to say in Moscow, "Sadovsky without Ostrovsky and Ostrovsky without Sadovsky are inconceivable", and that Shumsky in Molière surpassed the artists of the *Comédie Française.*

Little by little, however, under the influence of bureaucratic administration, the commonplace work of such play tinkers as Kruiloff (not the fable writer), Diatchenko and Tarnovsky crept into the repertory in the form of made-over plays from the French, and yet, side by side with mediocrity, the finer traditions of the theatre were kept alive by a younger generation of players from whom fame singled out for especial attention Yermolova, Lyeshkovskaya, Sadovskaya, Youzhin and Pravdin, — all of them still with the company; and Lyensky, Goryeff, Maksheieff, Ribakoff, Sadovsky II, Akimova and Muzil. Under the impulse

of this brilliant group, the old classic tragedy was restored to the repertory alongside the continuing Ostrovsky; and the striking tragic powers of Youzhin, Lyensky and Goryeff found expression in the plays of Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, Goethe, Schiller, Hugo and Pushkin. The last quarter of the century, therefore, set a new mark for the theatre and the repertory reached its greatest breadth. About 1900, however, death and illness weakened the company and the autocracy increased its interference, and so the Small Theatre went into eclipse for almost a decade behind the looming figure of the newly born Moscow Art Theatre. In 1908, Youzhin was forced into leadership by public opinion against the official antagonism, and, profiting by the example of the Art Theatre's thoroughness, he has restored the state institution in a period of ten years to its elder glory.

What lies ahead of Alexander Ivanovitch and his company I do not know. The Revolution of March, 1917, found the theatre ready to take advantage of freedom to consolidate in the hands of the artists themselves the powers yielded by the passing bureaucracy. A long document was drawn up, safeguarding not only the individual artist but the welfare of the production as a whole and providing for a sharp division between the financial and artistic functions of the theatre. Despite Bolshevik threats from Petrograd, Alexander Ivanovitch hewed to the course of the theatre as decided in council, regardless of the new political tyranny. Since the removal of the Government to Mos-

cow, his course has necessarily been more discreet. The theatre is simply waiting for the return of social order and peace, — waiting patiently, but not idly, for it knows that it is well to repeat the elder truth and beauty until you have a new song to sing.

My parting from Alexander Ivanovitch was as bitter as the greeting had been joyful. Two days before I left Moscow I called on him briefly in his apartment to say good-by. With a pause of hesitation, he asked me whether it would be possible for him to come to America and play such rôles as Shylock with an English speaking company. I answered that I thought it might be arranged, and then, very simply, almost like a child, he asked, " But can a Russian come to America to-day without being ashamed that he is a Russian? "

And in the surge of feeling that came over me, I almost forgot to dispel his doubts, for here was the ruthless imprint of political march and countermarch on the sensitive soul of the artist.

CHAPTER IX

The Kamerny, a Theatre of Revolt

I plunged into the Russian theatre on the extreme left, to use the political terminology which prevails in the Land of Revolutions to-day. Inasmuch as it was the first theatre to recover from the enforced vacation of the November Revolution, I started my theatregoing in Moscow at the Kamerny, a Little Theatre which is already a big theatre, — big in accomplishment, in significance and in prospects. The Kamerny is an interesting and important theatre not only because it is new, but because it knows what it is trying to accomplish and it has learned by careful and earnest experiment many of the ways to accomplish it.

The Kamerny, of course, is a revolutionary theatre in an artistic and not in a political sense. Contrary to the vast majority of Russians, its members would rather discuss light and color and posture than the future of the State. It is revolutionary in the sense that it has gone so far along the path of secession from the old conventional western theatre that the Moscow Art Theatre, a revolutionist of the early years of the century, now stands guard in the conservative or right corner of the Russian stage. The unfettered human

imagination is its inspiration; a simple symbolism based on common psychological experience is its method of expression; post impressionism, cubism and futurism are only a few of its manners of expression. And a frank and naïve honesty and sincerity are the dominant characteristics of the group itself and of the artists whom it comprises.

The Kamerny had a history. I was sure of that after I had visited it several times. It had a definite, conscious theory of the theatre, too. I was equally sure of that. For no theatre can display play after play in its repertory, all of them far off the beaten track of stage conventions and all of them achieving some measurable proportion of their evident intention, without having both a history in which it has had time to find itself and a theory to guide it along the path of its explorations. And it must be equally true that such a theatre has a personnel consisting of at least one and probably more than one distinctly individual and original imagination.

Speaking by the calendar, the Kamerny is a war theatre, for it opened its doors for its first performance December 25, 1914, well after Hindenburg had sent scurrying eastward the Russian hosts that had escaped his nets in the Mazurian lakes. In reality, however, it had its artistic birth a full season before in the *Svobodny* or Free Theatre, an experimental institution which opened its first and only season in the fall of 1913. A schism in its ranks resulted in the autumn of 1914 in the founding of two theatres

in Moscow, the Kamerny, which took with it the *régisseur* of the Free Theatre, Alexander Tairoff, and several of its most prominent players, and the Moscow Dramatic Theatre, which has become more of a popular house, losing the revolutionary and experimental impulse that gave birth to the parent stage and that still drives the Kamerny along on its courageous path of discovery.

If the Kamerny is not, therefore, strictly a war theatre, it is still a theatre which has grown to stability and self-consciousness either because of or in spite of the war. All of its important work has been done while the Russian armies were in the field, while some of its own members were at the front or else while in uniform on furlough they snatched precious moments to rehearse or even play with the company at home. I know of no other country which has thus brought into the world and nurtured a movement in the realm of art while still holding the grim guns of war and feeding and nursing the wounded. To see this same theatre making its allotted production each month under the anxious and uncertain moments of revolution is signal to bow before its indomitable spirit and to yield all honor to that portion of the Russian people which is determined to save for the world from the ruins of its political estate the beauty and the imagination which it has found and cherished.

The first production at the Kamerny in December, 1914, was the great Hindu classic, "Sakuntala", by Kalidasa. The translation was made by Constantin

Balmont, one of Russia's leading contemporary poets. The setting was designed by Pavel Kuznetsoff, whose work is most often exhibited with the futurists and the post-impressionists. The same artist was responsible for the scenery of Synge's "The Playboy of the Western World", which joined the Hindu drama later in the same month. Evidently, considerable work had been done on the repertory of the theatre before it opened its doors, a fact which is characteristic of Russian thoroughness in matters of art; for in January, 1915, the second month of the first season, two more productions were made: "Life Is a Dream", by Calderon, with scenery by N. K. Kalmakoff, and "The Fan", by Goldoni, with scenery by Natalia Gontcharova. The fifth and last production of the first season was made in February, "The Pentecost at Toledo", by Kuzmin, one of the pantomimes for which the Kamerny has shown a great predilection. The artist Kuznetsoff appeared again as the designer of the scenery.

Only four productions were made in the second season, 1915–1916, at intervals of a month, beginning in September. The first of them was "The Marriage of Figaro", by Beaumarchais, with a special score written by Henri Forterre and with scenery by Sergei Sudeykin. October brought to the Kamerny stage Remy de Gourmont's "The Carnival of Life", also with scenery by Sudeykin. France also provided the third bill of the second season, for in December, 1915, Rostand's "Cyrano de Bergerac", with music by For-

terre, was added to the repertory. Simoff made the scene designs. Then in January the last production of the season was made, — "Two Worlds", by Tor Herberg, with scenery by Fedotoff.

Shakespeare, England and "The Merry Wives of Windsor" had the honor of opening the busy season of 1916–1917, during which six new pieces were added to the repertory. The Elizabethan whimsy was first played in October, 1916, with scenery by Lyentuloff. "Thamira of the Cithern" followed in November. This Bacchic drama by Annyensky, with a special score by Forterre, was one of the most successful productions of the season and it was held over for the following season when I saw it. For it an artist from Kieff, Alexandra Exter, designed some intriguing scenery, distinctly cubist in its lines and masses. The theatre's second pantomime followed later in the same month, November. It was called "The Veil of Pierrette"; it was written by Donanhy and its scenes were designed by the artist Arapoff. I heard it praised in such terms that I am sure it will not be dropped from the theatre's repertory, although it was not revived while I was in Moscow. Sem Benelli's "The Supper of Jokes", with scenery by Foreger, followed in December, 1916; Labiche's "*Un Chapeau de Paille d'Italie*", with scenery by Fedotoff, in January, 1917. The last production of the third season, also held over for the fourth year's repertory, was "The Azure Carpet", by Liuboff Stolitsa. Forterre also composed music for this play, and the Armenian artist, Migan-

adzhian, who is well known and liked in Russia, to-day, designed the scenery for it.

England, or rather Ireland, also opened the fourth season at the Kamerny, for the week after the passing of the November Revolution permitted me to make the acquaintance of the Russian theatre, I found Oscar Wilde's hectic tragedy, " Salome ", strongly intrenched in the Kamerny's repertory. Of that production I shall write in a succeeding chapter, as well as of the later additions to the repertory: Lotar's " King Harlequin "; Debussy's pantomime, " The Box of Toys "; and Claudel's " *L'Échange.*"

Back of such a history, as I have said, there must be a definite, conscious theory of the theatre. That theory I finally obtained by dint of much persuasion in the form of a French translation by Forterre of the Russian original formulated by Tairoff himself. I pass it on to America, therefore, in the form of a paraphrase, for a literal translation into a third language is not likely to be very literal after all.

The founders of the Kamerny Theatre were really two: Alexander Yakovlevitch Tairoff, *régisseur,* and Alice Giorgievna Koonen, leading actress. Since 1914, the directing board has been increased by two: Henri Forterre, a French composer who has resided in Russia almost a decade; and Nikolai Mihailovitch Tseretelli, who now shares with Koonen the leading acting rôles in the theatre.

In the minds of Tairoff and Koonen, the new theatre set for itself the task of accomplishing a threefold end:

1. The putting in practice of the theories of a new form of theatrical art.

2. The breaking away from the traditions and the routine which up until the founding of the Kamerny had held sway over the Moscow theatres and the entire Russian stage, with the exception of the experiments and productions of Meyerhold and Yevreynoff in Petrograd. Concretely, this purpose amounted to a struggle against the manner and the method of the realistic theatre and especially those employed at the Moscow Art Theatre.

3. The expression of the theatrical action in all its fulness, its richness and its wide possibilities. The theatre should not shut itself up in any particular branch of its art, but should keep itself varied and supple and flexible and plastic.

Tairoff believed so thoroughly in his theory of the theatre that he was persuaded that the new institution ought to make its way as any necessary thing makes its way just as soon as the public saw that it was fulfilling a normal function. The contemporary theatre, as Tairoff saw it, had arrived at an *impasse* by depending on two opposite poles of expression. On the one hand it was supporting itself on realism and a minute psychology, thus losing the exterior sense of form without which the theatre can not exist. On the other hand it found expression in the objective spectacle, such as the fairy play in all its ramifications and developments, a form which lost or neglected the intimate emotions. The resulting deadlock was such that it

was difficult to emerge from it without creating a new form of theatrical art.

In this struggle, therefore, between the theatre of psychological sensations, representing the thesis, and the theatre of the fairy spectacle, representing the antithesis, the Kamerny has taken an intermediary position, representing the theatre of synthesis and trying to reconcile and ally both emotion and form in a harmonic and indissoluble whole. In order to arrive at this end, the Kamerny has thrown off the two yokes which so long have enslaved the theatre, literature and painting, and has tried to deliver it from their superimposed laws which have prevented it from developing according to its own natural laws.

Working from these principles and toward these ends, the Kamerny forced itself to create individually the atmosphere of each play. And in particular it found that it had to repudiate the scenery of two dimensions, width and depth, and construct the surface of its scenery in three dimensions, width, depth and height, in such a way that these dimensions would be in harmonic relation with the rhythmic and plastic movements demanded by the *mise en scène* of the play. The quality of height at the Kamerny, therefore, has no leading strings to reality, but is dependent on the emotional and rhythmic effect sought in each scene of each play.

The theatricalisation of the theatre, — that is the formula and the theory in brief that presides over the experiments at the Kamerny.

This formula and this theory of the theatre were spread among his associates by Tairoff in the rôle of actor and *régisseur* and adviser, and as a result, one by one, he has gathered around him the small group which now directs the Kamerny and the larger group which assists in carrying out the conceptions of the directors. The members of the directing board I have named already. In addition to them, the company includes about twenty-five others who all believe in the general artistic and dramatic theories of Tairoff. When it comes to details, however, I found that individual players often disagree with the director and follow lines of original thought and imagination. The group, therefore, is an independent concourse of artists who happen to be in agreement on the guiding impulse of their craft.

Realizing the subordinate place of painting in the art of the theatre but at the same time understanding its coöperative importance, a number of Russian painters have contributed their best and most representative work to the productions at the Kamerny. Here they have vied with one another as keenly as they have in their own exhibitions. Among the best known who have helped the Kamerny find its medium are: Alexandra Exter, whose costume designs for Wilde's "Salome" probably come nearer than any other single contribution to accomplishing the unique purpose of the theatre; Sudeykin, Kuznetsoff, Gontcharova, Kalmakoff, Lyentuloff and Miganadzhian.

Fulfilling the line of conduct it has traced for itself,

the Kamerny has not stopped with dramatic art in the accepted sense, but it has gone on into the study of gesture and pantomime in the belief that in this latter art there is an opportunity to place in strong and effective relief with the greatest persuasive power all the nuances hidden in the theatrical art. This it does by making the actor acquire the emotional gesture, really inseparable in drama from the word, but lost little by little in these latter years. According to these methods, three pantomimes have been presented at the Kamerny: "The Pentecost at Toledo", by Kuzmin; "The Veil of Pierrette", by Donanhy and "The Box of Toys", by Debussy.

The position of music in this newly conceived theatrical art has been largely developed and made conscious by Forterre. In the words of the composer himself, "Music has hitherto been represented in the dramatic art as a dynamic element, intended to strengthen more or less the dramatic situation. This function has now been replaced by a rhythmic and melodic element which, allying itself to the gestures of the actor, augments the expression by the persuasion of the rhythm and the melody." Such a use of music in the theatre was first made by Ilya Sats who composed the jolly, elfin score for the original production of "The Blue Bird" at the Moscow Art Theatre. Forterre has taken up the task where Sats left it at his death a few years ago and has carried it to interesting and sometimes surprising lengths in the most recent of the Kamerny productions. The results obtained are note-

worthy in the sense that the public when it sees a piece played does not often take into account that the musical element mingles itself in the dramatic element and that without it, according to the principles of Tairoff, the dramatic movement itself is impossible. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that this same public is deeply even if not consciously moved and influenced by the music as it is used at the Kamerny.

Just as a definite theory underlies an institution's history, so an individual imagination underlies every theory. In the Kamerny, therefore, everything leads back to the imagination and the personality of Alexander Tairoff. The guiding head of Russia's most revolutionary theatre is still very young — only thirty-three — and he entered the theatre more or less as an afterthought, since he studied for the law as a profession. He has reached his present position, therefore, in a very few years. His first experience in the theatre dates back only to 1912 when he abandoned the law and acted and served as manager in a cabaret known as The Stray Dog in Petrograd. Later in the same year he founded and managed the Theatre Mobile, a travelling dramatic company playing repertory and resembling our own travelling road companies in its business arrangements. With its excursions into every corner of the empire, however, it was a new departure and attracted considerable attention to its young *régisseur*. A year later saw Tairoff at the head of the newly founded Free Theatre in Moscow and still another year at the head of the Kamerny Theatre

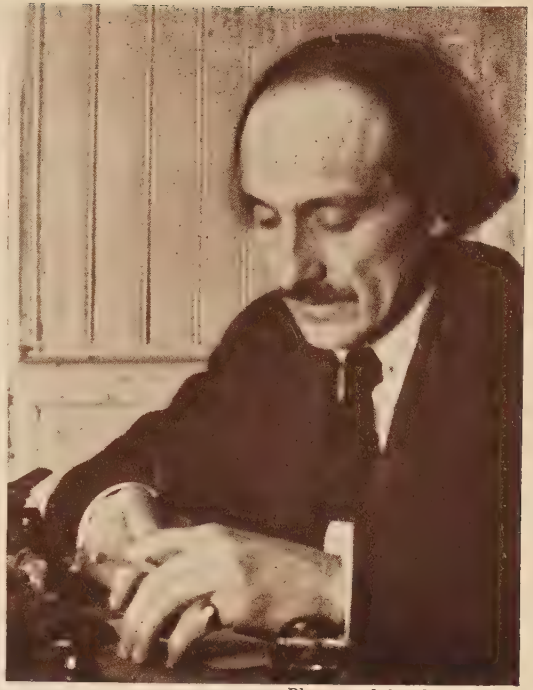
when the parent institution split into two organizations.

Alexander Tairoff is a gentle spirit, a man of simple, sympathetic manner. In defense of his theories, however, he becomes as pugnacious as the legal profession for which he was trained would ever demand. In stature he is small, in complexion dark, with a round face, regular features and a sensitive mouth. Owing to his stature he looks far more at home in his trim military uniform than he does in the ever-present Russian cutaway. He is a tireless worker, and one production is hardly safely before the public view when he is hard at work in conferences and rehearsals for the next one. As usual with a stage director, his real qualities come out in rehearsal when he enters into the work of each of his actors with such sympathy and such understanding and yet with such a clear-cut conception of what he wishes to attain that the experience is one of great stimulation both to director and actor. I don't believe there is a member of the Kamerny company who wouldn't turn handsprings around the stage until exhausted if Tairoff bade him.

The most intense and the most gifted and at the same time the most simple artist of the entire group is Alice Giorgievna Koonen. To her more than to all the other members of the acting staff put together is due the success the Kamerny has had with the public. Through her the Kamerny family tree reaches back to the Moscow Art Theatre and Stanislavsky, — the institution and the man which seem impossible to

Wasserman, Moscow

ALEXANDER YAKOVLEVITCH TAIROFF, DIRECTOR OF THE KAMERNY THEATRE, MOSCOW



Photograph by the Author

HENRI FORTERRE, COMPOSER OF THE MUSIC FOR THE KAMERNY THEATRE, MOSCOW

Saharoff, Moscow

THE CURTAIN OF THE KAMERNY THEATRE, MOSCOW, DESIGNED BY THE CUBIST ARTIST, ALEXANDRA EXTER, OF KIEFF

escape wherever you go in the Russian theatre. Koonen was a pupil in the school of the Art Theatre prior to the founding of the present Studio theatres of the Art Theatre. Her first important rôle on the public stage was Mytyl in the original cast of Maeterlinck's "The Blue Bird" in 1908. She was born of Belgian parents, a fact which gives singular interest to her participation in the first performance on any stage of the *féerie* of the great Belgian playwright. Anitra in Ibsen's "Peer Gynt" was another important rôle she played under Stanislavsky in 1912. Her acting ideals and her theory of the theatre, however, did not find sympathetic surroundings at the Art Theatre and so when the Free Theatre was founded in 1913 she went to it as its leading actress. There she played the rôle of Plum Blossom in the first Russian production of "The Yellow Jacket." At the Kamerny her most strikingly successful work has been done in "Sakuntala", "The Veil of Pierrette" and "Salome." In appearance and manner off stage she is diffident and retiring. In the theatre, however, she displays an astonishing breadth of method, a vivid sense of characterization and a sweeping, devastating passionate power that rises to its full height in the richly challenging rôle of the Hebrew princess in the Wilde tragedy. The first impression is that her voice with its rich cadences and its throbbing emotional qualities is her greatest possession. To see her in pantomime, deprived of the use of that instrument, however, is to realize that her instrument is her entire body and that

she has as complete control of its rhythmic power as she has of her voice.

The Kamerny would not be complete without the genial and lovable Forterre. I think probably he did well to come from his native Paris, where he was a student in the Conservatory, to his adopted home in Russia. Together with the French industry and *savoir faire,* he has the simple, childlike soul of the Russian artist, lacking almost altogether the sophistication which is Paris. He told me one day that he had a far greater belief in the ability of the Russian peasant to understand and create a great art than in the French peasant, because the Russian peasant has an international soul, and I am not sure that he was not unconsciously describing his own imagination.

At the Kamerny, Forterre is supreme in the field of music which plays so important a part in the productions of this theatre. Since the beginning of the second season he has arranged the score of practically every piece that has been played and for a number of them he has written original music embodying the principles which Tairoff has set forth and with which he is in complete accord. He has not limited his work of composition to the theatre, though, for he has had numerous pieces performed at symphony orchestra concerts, among which the best known are: "Dream", "The Perfumes of Happiness", "Man" and "The Music in the Sky." In appearance there is something in him resembling William Jennings Bryan, but Forterre's features are more finely chiselled. I shall never

forget a glimpse I had of him one afternoon on a platform high up in the fly gallery rehearsing the theatre orchestra with every ounce of his being, even up to the curling black hair that probably suggests the Nebraskan.

The fourth member of the directing board of the Kamerny is Nikolai Mihailovitch Tseretelli, a young actor whose work arouses warm sympathy at times and unwilling antagonism at others. Like Koonen, he was a student of the school of the Moscow Art Theatre but never played an important rôle there. His entire career has been unfolded on the stage of the Kamerny. In stature he is rather tall and his height is thrown into even greater relief by a very spare figure. I am still wondering whether it is not this tendency to physical awkwardness which interferes at times with his serious work. Certainly it is this quality which fits him so well for grotesque rôles such as that of Harlequin in the *commedia dell' arte.* He has much yet to learn, especially in the control of a powerful voice, but he is no less tireless than his peers and preceptor and he is bound to improve much in the next few seasons.

There are many others who bring individual gifts to the Kamerny's ensemble. Boris Ferdinandoff stands out especially from among them, for in addition to acting with a fine simplicity and spirit, he is an artist, too, and has designed the scenery and costumes for two productions.

No record of the Kamerny would be complete without a word regarding the connection with its destinies

of Salzmann, the greatest mechanical genius in the lighting of the modern theatre. Leaving Russia and his native Caucasus for lack of appreciation of his great gifts, he went to Germany and at Hellerau, with Jaques-Dalcroze, worked out the lighting of the strangest theatre in Europe. In September, 1916, he saw the work of the Kamerny for the first time and found a group of artists with whom he had sympathy and who in turn understood what he himself was trying to do, and so he gave Tairoff and his company the right to use his system of lighting exclusively in Russia for three years.

It is one of the ironies of war and revolution, however, that with this priceless possession the Kamerny is compelled to satisfy itself with the rudest and most primitive of lighting systems. Anything like a modern electrical equipment is simply not to be purchased in Russia. The year before the Revolution, the Kamerny was able to approximate Salzmann's lighting in its original quarters in the Tverskoi Boulevard. Economy and the pinch of war, however, compelled them to seek a more modest home, and consequently I saw them struggling to realize their ideals in a made-over club room. I could hardly believe my eyes when after criticising an unpleasantly "jumpy" effect in the lights I was taken back stage to see the rheostats, — old oaken buckets of water such as an amateur would rig up in a barn in America!

Better days lie ahead for the Kamerny, however. Some of them they hope to spend in America, where

they propose to give their vivid production of "Salome", which will be easily understood in spite of its Russian text, and several of their pantomimes which are above the entangling alliances and enmities and difficulties of language.

The Kamerny has not gone by beaten paths. It has broken with routine and tradition. And so it has encountered on its way both on the part of the public and the critics numerous obstacles which have sometimes retarded its progress. Still, these obstacles have probably also enabled it to learn valuable lessons. The stubbornness of its ideal has kept the group cheerfully at work through it all, until little by little the theatre has become conscious of its powers and its methods and the public has become accustomed little by little to the new and strange ideals worked out on its stage. With its latest productions, the Kamerny feels that it is beginning to reap the reward of following a path without detour and without compromise.

CHAPTER X

"Salome" in Cubist Vesture

The most impressive and at the same time the most representative production the Kamerny has yet made is Oscar Wilde's tragedy in one act, "Salome." This passionate document may have been produced elsewhere more extravagantly, with more *réclame,* more bustle and circumstance and more world-famous names in its cast. In fact, it was so played while I was in Moscow at the Small State Theatre. But surely it has never been produced either as drama or opera with a truer or more fearless appreciation of its passionate import. Green bronze is not its keynote at the Kamerny, to be sure, although Wilde so directed, but then it must be remembered that with all his excursions into the erotic and the exotic, Wilde never knew the seductive possibilities of the newer developments in art and their power to interpret passion in drama.

"Salome" at the Kamerny is frank and unashamed. But in that respect it does not depart from the formula of the entire Russian theatre or, for that matter, of all the Russian arts. A sense of shame, a sense of morbidness is completely missing from the esthetic appreciation of the Russian. He takes his art frankly and openly, stepping over and beyond the half-mood, middle ground of the *double entendre* of the French and

other Europeans, apparently without ever recognizing its presence. Thus he emerges on the other side, unfettered by any moral or other entangling considerations, with his mind and his imagination and his feelings free to react as they will in the presence of works of art. It may be due to the primitive nature of the Russian, still unspoiled by contact with Western civilization. It may be due to the Eastern strain in his blood and his own civilization. Whatever the cause, it has given to Russian art and to the Russian theatre, in particular, the originality, the freshness and the impetus which sent its name around the world and lured me to study it even in the days of terror and revolution.

The curtain at the Kamerny is the first omen of what lies ahead, for the auditorium, the reception hall of a remodelled club house, is lacking in distinctive features. In Russia as everywhere else in the world, the theatre of the secession has to be content with meager physical equipment until it has firmly established itself. The curtain, however, seizes the eye and blots out all other aspects. It is a bold study in the grotesque by Alexandra Exter. Black and gold are its dominant colors, although the painter has not slighted the remainder of her palette. Facing inwards at the centre are two monsters — a goat and a leopard, perhaps, standing on their hind feet. Facing outward are two equally eery demons — one a peacock and the other the swan's progenitor, it may be. The rest is a background of distinct post-impressionist or even cubist humors.

This intriguing curtain parts to the strains of exotic music, half barbarous, half over-civilized, composed principally for the horns by the Czech musician, Jules Giutel. Still another curtain is now disclosed, painted by Exter, who also designed the scenery and the costumes for "Salome." The second curtain is a strong and bold piece of cubist work in this Russian artist's most recent, self-assured style. It sets the aggressive, tragic, passionate keynote of the play, with a sharp pointed sun-like arc in white against a black background and above it to the right three flaming banners in red — military pennons set dead against the wind.

When this curtain, in turn, parts, the stage is disclosed as the terrace of Herod's palace overlooking the banqueting hall. Several great stone columns at the right are bathed by the red light from within, and in its glow a group of soldiers is seen dimly disposed at the head and around the foot of a winding staircase. Over to the left on the platform, is the wall of a well in which Jokanaan is confined; just beyond it is a dark curtain, with the moonlight, which Wilde demanded, staring on the scene in the form of a great green disc with streaming beams shooting out from it.

At Jokanaan's first speech, "After me shall come another mightier than I", the curtain with the cubist moon is drawn off to the left, and in its stead a lighter stage reveals two silver streamers of unequal length suspended from above and extending nearly to the ground. The red light, originally seen only at the right, now spreads over the terrace, as the voice of

Salome is heard approaching from the banqueting hall. By quick, sinuous movements and angular, passionate poses the action is carried forward: Salome overcomes Narraboth's misgivings; Jokanaan is brought up from the well, and Salome hurls herself at his white body, his black hair, his red mouth. By every sensuous implication of Wilde's impassioned lines, Alice Koonen develops her conception of the erotic princess, while opposite her Nikolai Tseretelli as Jokanaan depicts the flaming prophet in bold outlines but with finely sympathetic shadings. A high peak is reached when the young Syrian, Narraboth, kills himself on the staircase and flings his body headlong between prophet and princess. The taut rhythm is slackened for a moment during the tenderly beautiful lines of the page. But Koonen picks it up again without a break and the contrast is multiplied beyond Wilde's most eager dreams.

Slowly the silver streamers of the moon rise out of sight as the prophet descends into the well to escape Salome's insistent and ardent and ominous: "I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan!" The light grows redder and then blends into a portentous yellow as Herod, squat and gross, comes out on the terrace. Ever since Jokanaan has departed, Salome has clung infatuated to the cistern wall, holding her body strained against it. The white of her arms cuts an obtuse angle of yearning passion against the black of her robe and against the blue of the curtain behind her. And, increasing the passionate tension beyond power of word, her body bends far to one side along the line of one of

the arms. Thus she remains immovable during Herod's ominous vagaries and the disputes of the Jews, and she only grows more tense as the voice of Jokanaan rises from below in denunciation of Herodias.

Finally she comes forward, grim and quiet and determined, in order to make her bargain with Herod for the dance he implores. When the tetrarch has sworn to give her whatever she asks, her attendants slip out, close to the ground, to bring her the perfumes and the veils. The light turns blood red again, and the blue curtain at the back moves off to the left, leaving a red in its place.

Salome now enters, languorously, a red veil gently floating about her head. Her feet move inch by inch, her body hardly at all. The first veil descends gradually to the floor. The air underneath it buoys it up an instant and then the attendants stealthily draw it aside, as the second veil, red as well, falls from Salome's shoulders. Now the princess increases the tempo of the dance, pulls a green veil from about her breast, and sinks suddenly to the floor. Slowly, sinuously, she rises again and her whole body loses itself in the dance. Again and again she faces the well, rushing at it with a fury and a swiftness that lash the beads of her skirt against its sides, and then turning away from it as violently. She tears the fourth veil from her breast and the rhythm becomes quieter and more regular. A slow, free dance of ecstatic joy now carries Salome from one side of the terrace to the other, first toward Herod and then toward the well. The dance

becomes wilder and faster, around and around, with the beads of the skirt lashing the well again in frenzy. Madly up and down she rushes, bending her body in an impassioned arc first at the well and then toward Herod. From her waist she pulls the fifth veil as if it were a part of her body. And then as she hurls herself at the well for the last time and wrenches the sixth from her body, the lights vanish except for a torch or two which throw the tense and ardent form of the princess into sharp silhouette. Even the torches now are smothered, as the music of the dance dies away. When the lights return, Salome is fastening about her a gold and black robe and her attendants are replacing her headdress.

The passion which has satisfied Herod and quickened the blood of every one in the audience rests now without yielding its tension while Salome, hands above her head, demands her reward, — the head of Jokanaan. The entire court takes part instinctively in the movement. Quiet now but with throbbing body, Salome dominates the scene even more profoundly than she did in the dance, while Herod offers her his riches and pleads with her to yield her terrible purpose. One feels that it can not hold thus much longer when the tetrarch weakens and the ring from his finger is sent below with Naaman. A step at a time Salome advances toward the well. Over its edge she peers, impatient, insistent, restless, feverish. There is a sickening click of steel against stone, but she misinterprets it and her back is turned when Naaman's black arm

rises above the curb of the well with the head of Jokanaan under a red veil on the charger. Wheeling and facing her reward, Salome reaches for it, kisses it and then revolts from it, placing the charger on the edge of the well. She turns toward it again, though, crouching close to the ground and facing it with her upturned head just on a level with it. Still addressing it in Wilde's maddeningly sensuous lines, she rises, holding it above her head while the blood from it seems to drip from the charger on her face and into her mouth. Fascinated by it, she takes it slowly down with her until she reaches the floor. There she bends over it, still speaking to it and moving restlessly about as if the body of Jokanaan were still there with its severed head. Again she rises, holding the charger above her head, and the picture seems even more terrible now with the repetition, for there is something awesome and triumphant in her attitude. Still again she bends low with the head. When halfway down, the charger drops and rolls away and Salomé holds the head itself close to her body. Kissing it again and again, she covers it beneath her until the soldiers at Herod's command move forward to smother her under their shields. As they bury the mad princess from sight, great black streamers drop from above and blot the scene from view and the curtains in turn close them from sight.

The fundamental principles of cubism are translated into the language of theatrical production by several interesting means in the Kamerny interpretation of

" Salome." Cubism as a manner of artistic expression in painting has to do with two dimensions and a fixed result. Cubist sculpture adds a third dimension and in its most successful instances becomes that much more interesting, but it is still dealing with static results. Cubism in the theatre, though, must adapt itself to the essentially plastic nature of the theatre, and I was not sure, until I saw " Salome " at the Kamerny, whether it would become more or less expressive in undergoing this sea-change. The fact that it readily yields to the exigencies of the stage will undoubtedly give it a new impetus as a manner of expression in the world of art.

The curtain and the scenery, of course, afford the first indications that the production is cast in the cubist mold. In the former especially and even in the latter, Exter is at home in her media. When she reaches the costume designs, her plates, from which the accompanying illustrations were taken, were also familiar ground. The realization of the cubist effect in the actual costumes, though, must have been a far different problem. That problem, however, was solved satisfactorily and by very simple means. The natural folds of the garment are emphasized and compelled to adapt themselves to the cubist design of the artist. Not only the folds themselves, therefore, but their normal shadows, cast from one fold to the other, and abnormal shadings painted or stamped to exaggerate the shadows — all these means bring about the desired results with striking force and simplicity.

The last important means, of course, is the strict

rhythmic control of the human body. Strange to say, this revolutionary mode of expression, reaching out to a new freedom, brings greater results in controlling the entire scenic picture than all the strictures of the old stage ever thought of doing. An actor could slip out of the picture in the old days without any but the keenest eye consciously detecting his fault. In such a production as that of "Salome", each actor is so vividly a part of the entire picture that his least lapse is readily detected. Much more interesting than this result, however, are the endless possibilities revealed in the expression of emotion by this new and exaggerated school of gesture. True to the nature of cubism, it is angular and vividly picturesque in its static moments, — moments which it seems constantly to be trying to attain, only to release them and work toward a new moment through intermediary movement. This intermediary movement in "Salome" is often sinuous and graceful. The entrance of the princess, her dance and her orgy with the head of Jokanaan prove that. And of course it throws the static islands into very strong and stirring relief. Probably the nearest example America has seen of this use of the body in the drama is also Russian, — the bas-relief effect of the dancers in "The Afternoon of a Faun", as the Diagileff Ballet presented the Debussy interlude.

"Salome" at the Kamerny is not a one-rôle play, except as Wilde himself made it so. Nevertheless, Koonen's picture of the princess is such a masterpiece in impassioned action that she towers far above the

JOKANAAN

SALOME

HEROD

Photographs by the Author

COSTUME DESIGNS BY ALEXANDRA EXTER FOR THE CUBIST PRODUCTION OF OSCAR WILDE'S "SALOME" AT THE KAMERNY THEATRE, MOSCOW

Yarovoff, Moscow

ALICE GIORGIEVNA KOONEN AS SALOME IN THE CUBIST PRODUCTION OF OSCAR WILDE'S TRAGEDY AT THE KAMERNY THEATRE, MOSCOW

rest in the cast. Greatly equipped in natural ways, she knows either by rare instinct or long study how to use her gifts most effectively. For instance, she has a small body as lithe as a cat's which she can send mounting above every one around her, much as Nazimova used to do with such vivid and honest effect before she had forgotten the tutelage of Pavel Orlienieff, with whom she first played in America. Koonen's voice also is soft and supple and seductive, and Wilde's hot imagery fairly flames from her lips and her tongue. At the same time she possesses a keen sense of aristocracy, and when her Salome is most naked in the speech of her tongue and of her body, she is still the princess. I think it is this austere attitude toward the passions which saves the Kamerny " Salome " for tragedy.

Tseretelli as Jokanaan and Ivan Arkadin as Herod, of course, share the chief remaining burden of the play. Both of them are actors of imaginative power and earnest sincerity. Tseretelli, especially, possesses a richly sympathetic personality, while Arkadin's greatest gift seems to be a trenchant mastery of the grotesque. The former, however, could well dispense with his excess of voice at times, particularly in such a small auditorium as that of the Kamerny. The fault tends to obliterate the shadings which his characterization would otherwise have. It is interesting to see that he makes Jokanaan a highly strung human being, sensitive to passion as are other men, but controlling his emotions and consciously turning them into the hard mold of the ascetic and the prophet. His Jokanaan knows

what Salome could be to him, but although knowing, he still repels her. Arkadin's Herod would be more effective if the actor would vary his rhythm a little, for its tense and ominous obsession becomes monotonous in the course of the play. A little shading here and there would multiply its highly picturesque qualities.

Only one or two others make individual impressions. Boris Ferdinandoff as the young Syrian captain of the guard, Narraboth, cuts a clean white flame through the opening scene of the play. Ratomsky as the Cappadocian, and others, especially those who play the Jews, achieve striking results in cubist movement and posture. And Mihail Mordkin, of the Ballet, is present impersonally as director of the Dance of the Veils.

It might well seem that "Salome" played thus frankly and thus sensuously would be revolting or at least emotionally oversatiating. But there is something about the honesty, the sincerity, the singleness of purpose of producers and players that keeps their interpretation free from anything but the most austere tragic reaction. They have achieved tragedy not by restraint but by self-effacing unrestraint. There is no audience out in front as far as producers and players are concerned. There is not even the audience of Herod's court on the stage. Salome is dancing only for Herod who sees and for Jokanaan who does not see. The entire performance is intensely impersonal and at the same time hotly and passionately intimate, — a paradox which is possible only with artists and with audiences who view their art honestly.

CHAPTER XI

A Bacchanale and Some Others at the Kamerny

Judged by the first month's repertory at the Kamerny, the exclusive forte of this theatre was the erotic. After the cubist curiosities of "Salome" came the Bacchic abandon of "Thamira of the Cithern" and the more subdued passions of another tragedy, "The Azure Carpet." Perhaps that is not so strange, after all. The newer forms of art are nothing if not intense. And passion is intense. Therefore, by algebraic axiom, the newer forms of art are passionate. The exotic and the erotic are congenial companions.

By the holidays, however, the repertory began to broaden in range in accordance with the promise of the Kamerny's previous history. "King Harlequin", Lotar's tragi-comedy, was presented in extreme cubist guise in the spirit of the *commedia dell' arte,* — as dispassionate and objective a piece of make-believe as a Puritan could demand. In January, Debussy's pleasant little pantomime, "The Box of Toys", was ready, as unconcerned with sex and passion as the Tin Soldiers in its quaint cast of characters. Paul Claudel's *"L'Échange"* followed toward the end of the season, an involved quadrangle of the affections, but symbolic and mystic and austere rather than fleshly. Tairoff

knows as well as any one that the mental and emotional abstraction which he is seeking in the theatre is a mood of many hues, and his taste is broad enough to comprehend most of the spectrum of the imagination.

Although less personally passionate than the Wilde tragedy, " Thamira of the Cithern " is more impersonally erotic than any of the plays in the Kamerny repertory. In fact, this three-act drama by Innocent Annyensky is a Bacchanale in the entire Greek sense of the word. While its specific theme is one of passion — the passion, even, of a mother for her own son — this theme is almost overshadowed and enveloped by the warm joy in the body which hovers close in the foreground throughout the play and breaks through especially in the choral interludes. I know of no country but Russia where this play could be so interpreted today with simplicity and evident cleanliness of mind. The ancient Greek and the modern Russian come very close to each other at times.

The scenic background, which remains unchanged through the play, has a certain austerity and dignity combined with a passionate symbolism which at once links the cubist formula with the Greek spirit. The design is in the late cubist vein of the artist, Alexandra Exter, who created the scene and costumes for " Salome." A bank of steps in the centre is flanked in the foreground on the right by another tier of steps, leading up to the door of the musician, Thamira, and on the left by a group of massive cubist rocks. Further back the space at the sides is taken by other rock masses

with tall round tapering pillars rising from among them to the sky.

The play opens in the gray light of dawn, with a flute quality in the music by Forterre. Ariope has come seeking the home of her son, Thamira, whom she abandoned in childhood and who has come to this secluded spot to be alone with his music. In his absence, she throws herself prostrate on the doorstep. The light now becomes red by slow degrees, and down the steps and into the enclosure a chorus of Menads staggers. A slow, tortuous song accompanies their dance which takes them weaving, half-reeling, up and over and down the steps until they form a snake-like circle reaching from the top of the steps to the base. Bare arms linked in bare arms and moving restlessly but slowly in waves around the circle and back, produce a vividly sensuous effect. As song and prayer near an end, a sense of relaxation comes over them all, and the circle sinks on the steps, still holding hands. With their heads to the sky, eyes half-closed, and the leader in the centre, a hint of a flower design is held for a moment.

But only for a moment. For they have discovered Ariope and scatter in fear. Ariope listens to the mingling sounds of Thamira's music in the distance and the voices of the Menads calling to one another from behind the rocks. The light shifts backward and forward from a major to a minor until she enters the house, and then it sinks into the gray-green of dawn for an instant, only to color up into a high yellow

at the entrance of Thamira. He has seen Ariope entering his home and he is crossed. The mountains are no place for a woman. When she emerges and approaches him, he repels her, even when she proves her parenthood. He lives only for his music. No human love must cross his ambition, — neither the love of woman nor of father or mother. Rousing his interest by telling him she knows a way to bring him close to the gods of music, she grasps him as only a woman can hold a man. On the instant, he understands, throws her off, cries that mothers can not love like that, and with a leap he is lost among the rocks.

The second act begins again under a gray-green light. The Menads from among the rocks on each side weave in to the left until they gradually half encircle the prostrate form of Ariope. They are still a single quivering group by the joining of outstretched arms, — a rope of arms, sinuous and never quite still, plastic and passionate. This time, although they are startled, they remain and talk with Ariope, asking her who are her gods. "My son is my god!" she replies.

The hum of violins now yields to an insinuating music and Silenus the Satyr prances in from among the rocks. In a kind of animal urge, the Menads all bend toward him in welcome. A moment later two protégés of Silenus hop in from the right, — the Satyr of the Azure Ribbon and the Satyr of the Rose Ribbon. They are grotesque children, restless and angular, quick and animal-like in their movements, and when the

Menads try to catch them they gambol out of reach among the rocks. Ariope begs Silenus to help her fulfill her promise to Thamira to bring him close to the muses, but he says that all he can do is to arrange for a contest between Thamira and the goddess of music. Ariope leaves, filled with fear that Thamira will be won away by the goddess.

The light heightens into yellow as Thamira descends from his home and hears from Silenus of the proposed contest and the goddess. "If I win, I will marry her," the musician declares, taking his harp and playing it better than ever before. Ariope has been listening behind a rock. Emerging, she prays to the other gods that Thamira may lose the contest. As she prays, the lights at the front are extinguished and her figure on the steps, arms high above her head, stands clear cut against the lighter background. As she finishes her prayer, the lights shift frantically from one color to another until the curtain hides the scene from view.

In an intense red light the third act opens, with the Satyrs, almost a dozen of them, popping out from behind the rocks or up and over them. Gasping and grunting and squealing in animal joy, they strike mad postures at one another, with extremely active legs and dwarfed arms. In the distance they hear music and the song of women, and each of them tastes it in advance through his whole body. Suddenly one Menad leaps over a rock and a Satyr hops over her and drags her around while others lay hold of her. Then she seizes cymbals and the two engage in a wild reel, dis-

appearing among the rocks. Another Menad is lifted from the ground and hurried off by the rest. There is an interval, and then one by one the Satyrs stagger back, sated and exhausted. One by one, too, they sink weary and spent on the rocks until they form a worm-like mass with arms and legs intermingled.

As Ariope returns, the Satyrs awake and scatter behind the rocks with just a head appearing here and there. Thamira, also, returns and tells his mother that he has given up the contest, for he realizes that even if he won he could not marry the goddess and at the same time devote his whole life to his art. The Satyrs tell him that there are other joys in life and that one man must love one woman.

The musician now addresses his harp and tries to play it. But his gift is gone! In dismay, he hands it to Silenus, thinking that something is wrong with the instrument. But Silenus brings perfect harmonies from it. Thamira turns on his mother, suspecting her of interfering with his gift, but from the left in a ghostly light the Shade of his father Philemon pronounces sentence on mother and son. In addition to losing his gift of music, Thamira will become blind as punishment for his too great ambition, while Ariope will be turned into a bird for loving her son as no mother should love. Around the Ghost the Satyrs dance, approaching it with impatient animal movements, but it is heedless of them and retires slowly, silently, behind the great rock at the left. Thamira, who has gone off in despair, now returns sightless, — a

Saharoff, Moscow

THE SATYRS CARRY OFF THE MENADS IN THE BACCHANALE, "THAMIRA OF THE CITHERN," AT THE KAMERNY THEATRE, MOSCOW

Hornstein, Moscow

A SCENE FROM LOTAR'S "KING HARLEQUIN," AT THE KAMERNY THEATRE, MOSCOW

pitiable figure. The voice of Ariope as a bird reassures him and tells him she and Philemon will be with him always; a ghostly hand reaches out from behind the rock to prove that its presence is near; and the old slave comes out to guide the stricken artist to his lonely home.

" Thamira " is not a great play and if conventionally interpreted it would probably drag interminably. The drama of its story is meagre and its lines are verbose. But under the treatment accorded it at the Kamerny, it takes on a peculiar interest, revealing drama of great sensuous power in its choral interludes and keeping the senses all alert with the plastic use of the human body and the lighting and the music.

Forterre's music has an insinuating, sensuous coloring and is written in the curious middle mood between animal joy and human sophistication. The acting, too, partakes of this fantastic cross which the Greeks discovered and around which they built the best of their art. I know of nothing on the modern stage more truly Bacchic, — not even the glorious abandon of the Glazunoff Bacchanale as Pavlova and Mordkin danced it. It is the chorus which builds the success of " Thamira of the Cithern." Working in a close harmony but with great individual freedom, it creates a constantly changing picture as varied but as continuous as the restless surface of the sea. No one in America except Maurice Browne with his Greek chorus at the Chicago Little Theatre has understood so well the supreme importance of this function of the drama.

"The Azure Carpet", a study in passion in a subdued minor key, is the work of Liuboff Stolitsa, one of the comparatively few Russian women playwrights. It is written in verse in three acts and tells the story of the Khan Uzbek and his tragic love for the beggar girl, Mnever. My respect for it grew with acquaintance. The first time I saw it was the evening after the vivid "Salome", and I had the feeling that "The Azure Carpet" had been rained on and the colors had faded and run together. Later, however, I found that I had seen Florence after Venice, and Florence had its own charm, less obtrusive and more insinuating.

The mood of "The Azure Carpet" is to be found in Araby or Persia or the Caucasus somewhere between day and night, either at the twilight or the dawn of passion. "Salome", of course, is midnight under an erotic moon. The mad curtains of the Kamerny part to reveal a gossamer landscape of the dreamy East, painted in the mild hues of early dawn by the artist, Avagim Miganadzhian. Snow-capped mountains, with strange trees bent into tortuous shape by an unseen wind and ominous of tragedy, form the background. From that point forward, successive curtains with designs in softened Oriental colors lead the eye outward to a fountain in the centre of the Khan's garden and to the wall which bounds it on the left. The scene is like nothing so much as the picturesque garden scene designed by the Toensfeldts for the first act of Lady Gregory's "The Golden Apple" at the St. Louis Little Playhouse in 1917.

A plaintive processional, composed by Forterre, opens the play, and the women of Uzbek's harem file in and kneel before the fountain shrine. Their quarrels and jealousies reveal the restraint of the life they lead. A moment after they are gone, the full-voiced song of one of plebeian birth sweeps in on the wind from outside the garden. There is something primitive, common, and yet independent in its tones that hardly prepares one for the beauty of the beggar girl. On a perch on the wall with her flowers, she muses frankly on the freedom of her life and her satisfaction with it all.

Meanwhile, the Khan Uzbek has entered his garden. He stands listening to her rambling philosophy but soon approaches her. Although he tells her who he is, she shrinks away. Finally, though, she yields after Uzbek has promised that she will be as free as the winds if she will become his wife. With her he now sits in state while the royal counsellors discuss the disposition of the beggar girl. One urges Uzbek to immolate her on the stake, another to cut off her hands, but the chief counsellor perceives the Khan's affection for the girl and shrewdly urges him to accept her as a wife.

An Oriental bazaar, rich and sensuous in color and costume, with the booths set hot and close together, is the scene of the second act. An insinuating rhythm pervades the seductive singsong of the beggars and the merchants in the bazaar, and above its cadence the counsellors tell of the hanging gardens which the Khan

is building at Mnever's request and the wonderful azure carpet on which she will dance. A slave dealer with a young and handsome Christian captive, Gyaur, enters the market place, and soon afterwards Mnever herself comes to the bazaar. Instantly, she is attracted to the youth, buys him and with him enters one of the booths. She is fascinated with him because of the freedom of his spirit in spite of the bondage of his body. Discovery follows close upon her, however, for the eunuch and the heralds and then the wives and finally the Khan himself trace her to the booth. Alone with Uzbek, she insists that Mahomet has decreed kindness for every one, asks for mercy, protests her love for him and begs passionately for him to kiss her, defying the Mahometan conventions. She has to be content, though, with a kiss on the hand from the Khan.

A series of curtains in softly blending colors leads outward to the proscenium at the beginning of the third act. Gyaur tells Mnever he must leave, but she prevails upon him to remain for the disclosure of the azure carpet that evening. With auspicious ceremonies the hanging gardens are revealed, but Mnever has lost her interest in the azure carpet. Urged by the Khan, she mounts the terrace, but calls for Gyaur to come and play for her. Suddenly, she breaks from her dance and embraces Gyaur, and on the instant an arrow from the bow of one of the heralds pierces the slave's heart. Still, Mnever clings to him passionately, crying out that the kisses of a youth are better than those of an old man even though the youth be dead. The

herald had meant to strike down Mnever instead of Gyaur, but Uzbek completes the tragedy, for he rushes up on the terrace, plunges a knife into the beggar girl's breast and drinks a cup of poison to follow her into the Mahometan paradise.

Koonen overtops the rest in her acting of the rôle of Mnever. The most interesting feature of her performance is the note of commonness, of plebeian birth, which pervades her whole conception. As Salome, she is the high-born princess. Refinement is instinct in every movement of her body, — a passionate, sensuous refinement, it is true, but a passion and a sensuousness subtly expressed. As Mnever, subtlety gives way to frankness, and the comparison affords a striking insight into the emotional and psychological range of this fascinating player.

" King Harlequin " in itself affords Tairoff some excuse for interpreting it as a cubist *commedia dell' arte,* for the play-within-a-play characters of Harlequin and his comrades are figures from such an environment. The extension of their mood to all the other personages of the drama, however, is a gratuity on the part of the producer whose boldness is rewarded by the transformation of a rather ordinary sentimental tale into an ingenious bit of knowing gesture. I saw the same play under the title, " The Fool on the Throne ", at the Theatre Nezlobina, one of the less distinctive and less important of Moscow's many playhouses, and there as a conventional, realistic production it revealed all its inherent dullness. At the Kamerny, however, sophis-

tication has discounted sentimentality and has all but obliterated it by subordinating it to the amiable artificialities of the harlequinade. In the original, the figures of the Queen and the Princes and all the courtiers and ministers of state are semi-pasteboard. Tairoff revivifies them by making them all pasteboard.

A rigidly cubist curtain follows the freer cubism of the house curtain and prepares the eye for the first setting, a throne room with an uncomfortably stiff and royal chair planted on a huge blue block to which steps lead up between over-solemn pillars of white. The King is near unto death and Queen Gertrude has returned from monastic exile only to find the Genoese, her own people, as enemies at the gates and her son Boemund reckless of his responsibilities and consorting with Harlequin and his careless crew. The clown, though, is jealous of the Prince, for they both love the gentle Columbine. Sometimes, Harlequin says to her, he feels like a king himself and sometimes like the lowest mortal in the world. Of a sudden, jealousy flames into blows and in the struggle Harlequin throws Boemund to his death over a cliff back of the throne. Descending out of sight, he reappears in all the habiliments of the Prince. He, the actor, the clown, will play the rôle of Prince. He will play the rôle of King, too, for after a brief interval the sombre percussion of the death march tells of the passing of the King.

Now that Harlequin is gone, Columbine knows that she loved him. The whole band is lost without its leader. Pantaloon, disconsolate, comes to the King

for comfort. Did he love Harlequin? asks the pretending King. Well, he hopes Pantaloon will like the King none the less for killing Harlequin. Against the wish of the despondent clown, the King takes him as a servant, makes him swear fealty and secrecy, then seizes him and tells him the truth. The people are eager to crown their new King, and so Harlequin is brought before Queen Gertrude. Blind though she is, she knows that Harlequin is not her son, but she also knows that he has saved the country from disaster and, by his leniency, her own people from destruction. And so she crowns him while the crowd hails him King.

The business of being a king is irksome. Peasants come, begging restoration of what they lost in the war. "But you need everything for your palace and your throne," insists Tancred, uncle and minister of state. "These are my throne," Harlequin replies, pointing to the peasants. The King refuses, too, to sign any decrees of execution. "Not I but the power of my name is King," says Harlequin. Tancred already suspects the truth and remarks that the King is playing very well his part. Harlequin sends for Columbine, but she is inconsolable and she agrees to come to him the following night, only to kill him. When she confides her plan to Pantaloon, he is in a quandary but his tongue is tied. Harlequin sends for the players to appear before him and the court. The old clown returns to his master who clings to him and confesses it is very hard to reign. He will play his old rôle, says the King, and he will play it well!

The first three acts have run their course in almost the same setting. For the fourth, there is a black background. Strange angular lanterns swing from the sky. The throne and the pillars surrounding it are all awry. The actors set their stage before the assembled court and announce their harlequinade. Just as the play is about to begin, with Scapine as partner for the distraught Columbine, Harlequin in his own guise and costume leaps down from behind the throne, chases the presumptuous Scapine from the scene and plunges into an improvised drama in which he tells how he killed the King and played his rôle. It is better to be a good Harlequin, though, than a bad king, so he and Columbine are married, bid the astounded courtiers farewell and depart in the boat Columbine had prepared for her own escape before the royal audience realizes that this is truth and not a drama they have been watching.

The settings in "King Harlequin" are severely simple, the costumes antic in their grotesquerie. Both are the work of Ferdinandoff, the young man whose playing as Narraboth is so impressive in the first scene of "Salome." He is extremely reticent, knowing only his own language and reserved in the use of that, but he is fine in spirit and imagination. Thus far as designer he is a little stiff in his simplicity, but he is likely to do much better work for more worthy material. None of all his good-natured whimsies in this production is quite so amusing or quite so characteristic as Pantaloon's headgear — a kind of cross between

a college mortar board and Happy Hooligan's tin can. But perhaps I got these implications where a Russian wouldn't!

Those in Moscow who are most irritated by the Kamerny's unconventionality are ready to admit and even to praise the vesture which Tairoff, with the assistance of Forterre in the orchestration, of Ferdinandoff in the designs and of Mordkin in the dances, has given to Claude Debussy's jolly pantomime, "*La Boîte à Joujoux*" or "The Box of Toys." "To dress serious drama in garments men never wore and never will wear is one thing and a very exasperating thing at that," they say, "but it is all very well to deck out thus a children's fantasy." "The Box of Toys", as produced at the Kamerny, is a kind of Franco-Russian Mother Goose. It is, indeed, sugar cakes for the nursery age and the Kamerny invariably presents it at matinees. But, like "The Blue Bird", which is always an afternoon host at the Art Theatre, it has subtler pleasures for grown-up children.

"The Box of Toys" hasn't as much plot as a musical comedy. The Dolls and the Soldiers and the Shepherds and Polichinelle and Harlequin and the Elephant and all the rest simply come to life, examine each other curiously and with mild satisfaction and then take their places once more in the booth and the box from which they first emerged. There is a hint of a love story between the most beautiful doll and Polichinelle — the kind of love story with its attendant jealousies which a child can comprehend — but that

is all. The rest is simply naïve incident and frolic and gesture.

The Kamerny's curtain is too eccentric to introduce the innocence of " The Box of Toys ", and so a special curtain is provided, all dotted over with funny little people, one of them standing on his head and the rest trotting around among vari-colored blocks. When it is drawn up, a poster with Debussy's legend for his pantomime is revealed:

La Boîte à Joujoux

Les boîtes à joujoux sont des sortes de ville dans lesquelles les jouets vivent comme des personnes. Ou bien les villes ne sont peut-être que des boîtes à joujoux dans lesquelles les personnes vivent comme des jouets.

A modified cubism is the manner in which the pantomime is presented, a cubism which takes its cue from the nursery simplicity of proper toys,— the realism of toyland, in a manner of speaking. One of the most ingratiating features of the Kamerny's production is the open-eyed wonder which the players of the toys maintain throughout. Another deft touch is that which directs that arms and legs shall be slightly stiff and awkward. After all, how do you suppose a toy would know the use of these instruments right at first if he came to life! And so when Polichinelle or one of the Soldiers embraces the Doll, his elbows press her arms lightly and his hands protrude behind her. When they kiss, their lips come ever so close but they do not touch. The mysteries of life are mastered but slowly!

It is a great pity that Tairoff has felt bound by the composer's directions in all their details, for the production thus inherits one of the worst faults of French pantomime, — the use from time to time of audible sounds characteristic of the action, such as the squeaking of the Doll when the Soldier bends her over, or the sharp clapping of the hands of the little children dollies. The fault is on a par with the disturbing smacking of the lips of the excellent actor of the father in " Pierrot the Prodigal " in New York a few seasons ago. Pantomime is panto-mime — " all-imitation " — and to inject in it even the slightest representative sounds shatters the mood in which it is conceived.

Such a definite and singular aim as the Kamerny has set for itself naturally excludes from its use many plays which would be hopelessly distorted if poured in its mold. Tchehoff, for instance, and the realistic dramas of Gorky are inconceivable on the Kamerny stage. Claudel's *" L'Échange "*, however, should have yielded to interpretation by Tairoff, but the Kamerny, fortunately for its future service to the Russian stage, is still in the experimental period, and mistakes, if they are honest, can not harm it. Ultimately, of course, it will find its best service in interpreting plays written especially for its use.

CHAPTER XII

Here and There in Moscow Theatres

One of the most interesting of the experimental stages in Moscow is the Kommissarzhevskaya Memorial Theatre, directed by Fyodor Kommissarzhevsky and named in honor of his sister who, though of Polish blood, was acknowledged for years before her death in 1910 as Russia's greatest actress. It was not without a feeling of chagrin that I first visited this theatre, for as an American I could not forget how in 1908 New York failed to wake up in time to the presence of genius in its midst and how Vera Kommissarzhevskaya returned heartbroken to her native land, thinking that America had rejected her. Of course, it was simply another case of America's tardy appreciation of unexpected, unheralded and unexplained greatness, but the memory embarrassed me just the same. The brother of the actress and the director of the theatre, however, soon put me at rest, for he was willing to forget the past and anxious to assist me in the task of telling America of his experiments and his achievements.

It was early in December, soon after the theatres reopened, succeeding the November Revolution, that I saw the first of Kommissarzhevsky's repertory. I

began on familiar ground, choosing for the first visit a dramatized version of Dickens' "A Christmas Carol." I was pleased and my curiosity was aroused, and soon afterwards I saw Sologub's "Vanka the Butler and Page Jean." Here was Russian comedy done with zest and richness of flavor and freshness of touch. At later intervals I saw "Pan", by Charles van Lerberghe, and was disappointed; then Aristophanes' "Lysistrata", and I began to lose interest. But shortly before my departure, the theatre regained its original place in my regard through a singularly incisive dramatization of one of Dostoievsky's short stories, "A Bad Anecdote." The *régisseur* evidently had a gift for interpreting human character with sympathy and simplicity.

The Kommissarzhevskaya Memorial Theatre was founded in Moscow by the brother of the actress in 1914. It was the direct outgrowth of the school of acting and stagecraft which he opened in Moscow in 1910. "The Free School of Scenic Art" he called it, and in the words of his prospectus he set out "to find with his pupils and his artistic friends the new means of artistic and scenic interpretation for new authors, Russian and foreign, and for the classic authors. At the school and the theatre of Kommissarzhevsky, the naturalistic ideas of the theatre of Stanislavsky will be completely unknown. It is to be a theatre purely esthetic and theatrical."

For four years, then, the director conducted his school and prepared his future actors for their tasks.

In the fourth season of the theatre I saw the school running side by side with it, providing actors from its advanced ranks for the smaller rôles on the stage of the theatre. It is the director's policy to advance his pupils as rapidly as they display progress and there is, therefore, an intensity and freshness and rivalry to be seen in many of the productions due to the effort of these students to justify their advancement. Development of diction and voice, with instruction in singing to assist the speaking voice; development of the body through plastic and rhythmic exercises; study of the theory of theatrical art; wide acquaintanceship with the literature of the theatre in all countries; improvisation on the stage for the development of emotional technique and imagination and theatrical presence of mind; and finally experience on the stage of the theatre — these make up the chief points in the course of instruction at the school.

At his theatre, Kommissarzhevsky has had this principle for his *mise en scène:* to achieve a harmony between the interpretation of the actors, the ensemble, the forms and the colors of the scenery and costumes, the music and the light — the harmony between all these and the idea and the style of the dramatic author. With this as the guiding principle, fifteen productions with a total of seventeen plays were made in the first four seasons. " Dmitry Donskoi ", a tragedy by Ozyoroff, opened the house in the fall of 1914. A double bill followed, consisting of Molière's " The Sicilian " and Ostrovsky's " A Family Picture." Then

came the dramatization from Dickens — "A Christmas Carol" — which is still a faithful member of the repertory, and the fifteenth-century morality, "Everyman." The first season was brought to a close with the dramatization from Dostoievsky's "A Bad Anecdote."

The second season opened with "Night Hops", a play by a modern Russian writer, Fyodor Sologub. "The Choice of a Fiancée", by Hoffman; "May Night", by Gogol; and "The Cursed Prince" by Remizoff, another contemporary Russian playwright, made up the new productions of the year 1915–1916.

Sologub also opened the third season with his comedy, "Vanka the Butler." Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "Elektra" followed, and then Balzac's *"L'Amour sous le Masque."* Another double bill rounded out the 1916–1917 season: "The Comedy of Alexei, or God's Man", by a modern Russian, Kuzmin; and Leonid Andreieff's "Requiem." In the fourth season the only new productions were van Lerberghe's "Pan" and "Lysistrata" of Aristophanes. The theatre has in preparation Hauptmann's "Hannele"; Wedekind's "The Box of Pandora"; and Voltaire's "The Queen."

The Kommissarzhevskaya Memorial Theatre is a theatre in miniature but it does not give the impression of being cramped. The auditorium, the stage and all the various departments of the institution except the school, which is across the street in another building, are comprised in the rambling rooms of a large reconstructed dwelling house. The hall seats only

one hundred and fifty spectators and the seats rise at a comfortable angle. On the stage there is barely passageway at each side, often not that at the back and no loft at all. Much more generous rooms open out to the rear and at the sides for the actors, the painting of the scenery, etc. But it is impossible, without tunnelling ancient Russian masonry almost as formidable as the walls of Kenilworth castle, to throw them into the stage area.

Three devices assist Kommissarzhevsky to achieve interesting results in this bandbox. One of them is his excellent lighting system and his knowledge of how to use light eloquently. There is barely space along the ceiling of the room which has been converted into a stage for the rows of overhead lights. Footlights are absent and the actor approaching the front of the stage is kept in normal aspect by a concealed bank of lights just in front of the proscenium top, tilted at an angle to shut off bothersome shadows. Then in almost all of the productions which I saw at the theatre, an extremely fine-meshed gauze screen is stretched taut over the entire proscenium opening. Unless you sit in the front row and are technically curious about the theatre you will probably not notice its presence at all. But it is there, and its effect is to push the actors and the entire scene off into the distance without making the figures smaller. A certain aloofness, a strong sense of objectivity, is the result, a kind of intangible and transparent but potent wall, erected between spectator and player. Finally, the use of curtains is

frequent and effective. Many scenes are set with curtains at both sides and at the rear with only a piece of furniture or a bit of suggestive wall inserted to indicate the locale. Outdoor scenes are even more effectively presented than indoor, a strange thing in the theatre except where the *kuppelhorizont* solves all the producer's exterior problems. And the result is achieved simply by a very deep false proscenium. Curtains stretched taut at both sides and overhead lead the eye back from the real proscenium to a safe distance. Then there is a vacant space for a few feet, — enough for the movement of the actors. And finally the back curtain, which extends safely out of sight at both sides and above. The actors, of course, play all the way forward under the false proscenium.

On this stage "A Christmas Carol" emerged as a series of character studies rather than as a play, for Dickens defies adequate dramatization in Russian as he does in English. By simple devices, the setting is indicated, — high desk and stool for the office, narrow bed and pinched-up fireplace for Scrooge's bedroom, and an ampler hearth and dining table for Bob Cratchit's home. Without doubt, the most successful scene in the production is that in which Marley's ghost appears to Scrooge. Here you forget completely and absolutely the half-sketched setting, as you should do if Kommissarzhevsky's method is to be really successful. The tinkle of bells merging imperceptibly into the clanking of chains heralds the coming of the ghost, a powerfully suggestive and terrifying and yet

a very simple device. An exaggeration that stops just short of the grotesque makes the face and figure of the ghost a picture amply fulfilling the ominous conceptions which the clanking chains have aroused. And then his piercing cry and the dark which follows, lit only by a small candle with its shivering shadows, bring the scene through an intense course to a decisive conclusion. Its last moments with the ghostly shadows recall the like effect gained by Lennox Robinson in his staging of T. C. Murray's "Birthright" for the Irish Players.

"Vanka the Butler and Page Jean" is a characteristic sample of Russian comedy. It probably could not be presented before a western audience even as properly as one or two of the most outspoken plays in the Kamerny's repertory. With its parallel scenes of French and Russian life as it was lived in the eighteenth century, it is French frankness with Russian frankness added. The impression exists that Sologub attempts to imitate Dostoievsky and there are undoubtedly scenes and characters in "Vanka" which bear out this contention.

"Vanka" is interesting in the first place for its construction. Each of its nine scenes is presented twice, once as the story might have happened in eighteenth-century France and then by contrast as the same story might have taken place in eighteenth-century Russia. One has the strange and not unpleasant feeling of reading a chapter of a book in one language and then turning back to its beginning and rereading

it in a translated language. Only here, the translation from the French version of love and life is not literal. In suffering the sea-change into Russian, many details of habit, custom, character and purpose are set forth by the dramatist as very different in his native land. Loyal to it, he brings the play to a conclusion favoring the good and forgiving heart of the Russian in contrast to the less sympathetic and less human Frenchman!

Vanka is only a nickname for Ivan or John, which, of course, translated into French carries out the comparison indicated in the title and retained throughout the play. Its first scene merely gives the setting for the story and the characters, a French count, his wife and one of their servants, Jean; and then in the Russian version, a Russian prince, his wife and one of their servants, Vanka. The second scene shows the wife interested in the servant and asking for his advancement, first the French, then the Russian. From the simple curtained interior of these two scenes, the play now moves into the third, a garden, indicated only by a strikingly painted and impressionistic back curtain. Here the story skirts the realm of danger, with the promoted servant and the mistress making eyes at each other, and, before the scene closes, stealing from each other the first kiss. The contrast here shows the French Jean and the countess as very intense and losing themselves seriously in their passion, whereas the Russian pair seems to act just as if in good sport. Of course, the contrast in manners here as throughout the

play adheres to the accepted refinement of the French and the rough and crude heartiness of the Russian.

In the fourth scene, the play has reached the bedroom stage of development, and both in the French and the Russian versions runs beyond Anglo-Saxon limits for the dramatic stage and the printed record of it. There is no innuendo, though, simply a frank exhibition of the course of events with the curtain drawn when that course has become unmistakable. Here, too, the intensity of the French manner is contrasted unfavorably by the author with the casual offhandedness of the Russian way of doing these things.

Jean and Vanka are beset by the other servants in the fifth scene and one after another the girls try to attract his attention. Finally he yields to one and in the sixth scene he is shown drinking with them all and discovered by one who has been rejected and is jealous. The Russian version of this scene is particularly rich in flavor and in character study and brings to mind some of the scenes from Dostoievsky. Dismissal follows in the seventh scene and punishment in the eighth. A fine bit of humor marks the Russian version, for on the way to the beheading, Vanka points out a beggar to his executioners and for a few kopecks induces them to take the poor devil instead of himself to the block! And then comes the final scene — the punishment of the wife. *En français,* Madame Countess is chased from the room with a lash by her angry husband. *Po Russky,* the prince storms and threatens and raves against his wife and then of a sudden opens

his arms for her to come and receive forgiveness. Thus does Sologub pay tribute to the good heart and the forgiving nature of his race.

" Pan ", a comedy in three acts by Charles van Lerberghe, gave promise in its first act, especially in its first quarter hour, of great lyric beauty. In a simple peasant home, a group of gypsies is gathered, wild souls whom the peasant has harbored as he would harbor any passer-by. Out through the door is a glimpse of the sea and in through the door float the strains of a supernatural music. Of a sudden, Pan himself springs to life in the room and the gypsy girls all bow down to him as to a god. Immediately, there is a problem in the village and immediately the play becomes a character comedy and even a farce before it is through, losing all its lyric significance and promise.

" A Bad Anecdote " is one of Dostoievsky's untranslated short stories, extending over not more than fifty pages. The dramatization has been made in five scenes and it follows the story with extreme faithfulness. By admirable control of his lights, the producer brings slowly, stealthily into view the picture of three state councillors or civil generals. Nikiforoff and Shipulyenko are reactionaries of the deepest stripe. Pralinsky professes liberal views. Nikiforoff and Shipulyenko admit that reforms are good but usually there is something naïve and childlike and helpless about them. Pralinsky protests his belief in humanity and brotherhood. His opponents fear that great disasters may rise from permitting reform to get under

way. Pralinsky replies with his theory that if you are kind-hearted to those beneath you, they will like you. Liking you, they will believe in you. And believing in you, they will believe in your reforms. When Pralinsky sends for his carriage, the servant brings word that the coachman has gone and left his master to take care of himself. Pralinsky hotly curses the fellow, and his friends, observing the contrast between theory and practice, advise punishment of two hundred stripes with the whip. That, of course, is so exaggerated that Pralinsky sees the point, cools down and says that he will walk home and punish his servant by making him ashamed of himself.

The three men have had a little too much to drink and the second scene shows Pralinsky staggering home along a dimly lighted street. The tumbledown buildings painted on the back curtain are grotesquely distorted by the artist, Annyenkoff, as if they were seen through the tipsy eyes of the general. There is music coming from one of the houses in the street, and in answer to the general's question a policeman tells him there is a wedding inside. It turns out that the place is the home of one of the young men who work under Pralinsky in his department. Aha! Here is the opportunity to test his theories. Will the young man and his guests become frightened if he breaks in on the party? They would ordinarily, he says, but not with him. On the contrary, he will make himself popular by such a course.

And so the third scene, in the parlor at Psyeldonim-

off's, brings Pralinsky, still dangerously unsober, into the wedding group. A discolored, distorted back curtain with crooked windows painted on it indicates the setting. Confusion, of course, follows his entrance, but the general is talkative, tells how he quarrelled with his friends, how he was left in the lurch by his coachman, how he started to walk home, how he got into this part of the city, asked about the music he heard, found who lived here and just happened to drop in on them. His own frank and unbosoming manner helps to put them all at their ease. Soon he asks for the bride and when she shrinks timidly from the introduction, he gives her some very specific and embarrassing advice. Little by little the guests regain their confidence and make remarks, rough, silly and pointless, just as Dostoievsky's characters always do under such surroundings and just as they do in the drab course of everyday life. There is a " scene " with the mother of the girl who has not been invited to the party and who upbraids them for currying favor with the general by having him here. Pralinsky now drifts into a general philosophizing about rebuilding Russia, and one by one they leave him alone and go off to their own dances and sports. The scene closes with the fact beginning to dawn on the general that he is not at all pleased with the familiarity which he has courted from his inferiors.

The dining room is the fourth scene with an age-mottled wall and a wry stove painted on it to indicate the locale. One guest is already drunk and another

and another join his estate until that party is in the majority. Pralinsky has been drinking more, too, and he tells them they are all his friends; he is the friend of humanity; through his theories Russia will become a new country. By this time they are not the least afraid of him and they laugh at his notions as if he had intended them as a joke. He does not like this turn of affairs and protests that he has not spoiled their sport. "On the contrary," says a young newspaper correspondent very frankly, "you have spoiled our sport. You have drunk two bottles of champagne and you don't realize how we have had to save to buy such things for our wedding party. Besides, you didn't 'happen in' at all, but you came deliberately, not as a friend of humanity but just to make yourself popular with us!" Pralinsky is abashed by this, and the grim humor of the scene is heightened by the poor bridegroom, Psyeldonimoff, rushing about from one centre of disturbance to another, trying futilely to keep order and save his employer from insult. The guests are departing by this time and the general, dead drunk, falls helpless on the floor. Psyeldonimoff brings the scene to its conclusion by expressing his dual fear that he will lose his bride as well as his position as a result of the evening's fiasco.

The final scene at the home of Pralinsky next morning shows a table, a chair and a snatch of wall. The general sits by himself, ruminating over the outcome of the night and considering the necessity of resigning his post. He will have to change all his ideas.

They were just children's talk. He will be very strict with his inferiors. In signing his papers, he sees one from young Psyeldonimoff asking to be transferred to another department in order to avoid the awkward and embarrassing consequences of the night before. And the play closes with Pralinsky admitting that his friends were right. "After all," he says, "I didn't hold my own."

It is impossible to look upon "A Bad Anecdote" as a defense of reactionary theory and policy on the part of Dostoievsky. The novelist suffered Siberia and the terrors which he has depicted in "The House of the Dead" as a revolutionary of the nineteenth century. It must be viewed, therefore, as a trenchant and pungent satire on dishonest and insincere attitudes of reform. More than that, however, "A Bad Anecdote" has those larger, deeper human significances which rise above theory and politics and propaganda. Characters are painted with those swift strokes displaying the author's insight into human motives, — an insight unparalleled in literature.

Fyodor Kommissarzhevsky is a slight man with a reddish-brown complexion. He is intense and nervous in his movements, eager as a boy about his work and almost never resting from it. I found him one of the hardest men in Moscow to run down and one of the most agreeable once I caught him. He was born in 1882 and made his debut as a *régisseur* and a designer of scenery at the Dramatic Theatre of Vera Kommissarzhevskaya in Petrograd in 1908. With his famous

sister, he visited America that same year and was closely associated with her until her death. Then he passed to the Theatre Nezlobina in Moscow as director, and in 1913 he was engaged at the Imperial Theatres in Moscow as *régisseur* of the companies at the Great Theatre and the Small Theatre. At present, in addition to his own theatre, he is engaged as the chief *régisseur* of Opera at the Theatre of the Soviet of Workmen's Deputies, formerly known as the Zimina Opera. In addition to his practical work in the theatre itself, he has written two books concerning dramatic theory: "Theatrical Preludes", and "The Art of the Actor and the Theory of Stanislavsky." Prior to the opening of his own theatre, he had produced for others for the first time on the Russian stage, Molière's "*Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*", "Turandot", Goethe's "Faust" and many other plays.

At the conclusion of the memoranda concerning his theatre which Kommissarzhevsky gave me, he wrote this paragraph: "During the three years of the theatre, the public of Moscow, accustomed to productions naturalistic and imitating ordinary life, has not filled the small hall of the Kommissarzhevskaya Memorial Theatre, and it does not have a taste for the productions of the new romantic type. In the press the new theatre has met with a welcome very cold and critical." The frankness which is willing to confess these facts, however, is equal to the task of surmounting them. War and its demoralizing effects have prevented any large part of the public from interesting themselves in the

experimental theatre. When the ruble is going down and the prices of food that may still be bought are going up, the money spent for the theatre will be devoted to the conservative stages or those which have been established long enough that the visitor knows what he will find when he goes. I think Kommissarzhevsky may be trusted to realize this fact and hold his ground until Russia can devote a leisure ear and eye to those pioneers who are seeking new paths in art.

The lighter side of the Russian stage is far inferior to its sober aspects. Musical comedy is a poor, bedraggled waif in comparison with its gay and glittering sisters in New York and London and Vienna. There is no Russian Ziegfeld to lure into his gorgeous net the abundant ranks of Russian feminine beauty. The Ballet, perhaps, performs that task as an incidental to its more ambitious functions. Varieties abound in Moscow and Petrograd, but for the most part they lag far behind the London Music Halls and the American circuits. One by one under the strain of revolution, they dwindled in attendance and snuffed out, until when I left for home there was only a handful remaining. The very stages which would thrive in a time of stress in America and in western Europe yielded to the demand of the Russian nature for the most substantial phases of her art and pastime. When under war and revolution Russia had to give up one aspect after another of her normal life, she kept her theatre to the last. And when she had to surrender

a part of that last remaining structure of the elder order, she clung to its most inspiring towers.

One figure and one stage stand out against this background of mediocrity. The man is N. F. Balieff, one of the greatest of living clowns, and the stage is his super-cabaret, *Letutchaya Muish* or The Bat. I never forgave myself for neglecting this antic underground retreat and its droll proprietor until my third month in Moscow, but once I found it I had a hard time staying away. Balieff began at the Art Theatre; who didn't, in fact? There he played such divergent rôles as that of Bread in "The Blue Bird" and the clerk in Ibsen's "Brand." It is difficult, almost impossible, to conceive of him in a serious part, until you remember that every Russian player takes his work, whether it be in comedy or tragedy, with the utmost seriousness. Balieff is most serious as artist when he is most ludicrous as entertainer.

Naturally, though, the Art Theatre did not give him the widest opportunity for the use of his peculiar gifts. Personality had to be sunk in a rôle at the Art Theatre, and his whimsical personality is his greatest possession — his personality and his face. I can imagine nothing more disastrous at a funeral than the appearance of that oval, lit by piercing black eyes and traversed by a sensitive mouth. Even in repose, its humor is contagious. A twitch of that mouth, a flash of the eyebrow, and he has told a whole story. He seems to take the greatest delight and I know his audience does when he stands just inside the wings

Saharoff, Moscow

FYODOR KOMMISSARZHEVSKY, DIRECTOR OF THE THEATRE IN MEMORY OF HIS SISTER, THE GREAT ACTRESS, VERA KOMMISSARZHEVSKAYA

Hornstein, Moscow

N. F. BALIEFF, RUSSIA'S GREAT ARTIST-CLOWN AND FOUNDER OF *Letutchaya Muish*, THE *Chauve-Souris* OR THE BAT, MOSCOW'S SUPER-CABARET

Saharoff, Moscow

A SCENE FROM MAXIM GORKY'S SHORT PLAY, "MOTHER," AT BALIEFF'S *Letutchaya Muish* OR THE BAT, MOSCOW

and makes pantomimic comments on a song that holds the centre of the stage. I often felt sorry for the bewitching young singer, for no one paid the slightest attention to her!

Before he left the Art Theatre, Balieff established *Letutchaya Muish* as a private circle for Moscow artists and players and their friends. Entrance to it was jealously guarded and eagerly sought. That was in 1908, for he was preparing to celebrate his tenth anniversary about the time I left Russia. This exclusive circle grew, first into a public cabaret where the auditors sat around tables during the programme and then into its present form, — a snug and cosy little auditorium with capacious and bizarre refreshment rooms and a homelike foyer opening off it where the long intermissions seem all too short. A winding incline, decorated as if for Hallowe'en, takes the visitor down from the street to these canny caverns under Moscow's largest apartment building. I had not finished with the odd and grotesque mementoes strung along the walls when the eager proprietor bustled me off back stage to see his lighting and mechanical equipment, all in miniature like everything else, including its short and pudgy owner, but the most modern and complete in any Russian playhouse. Only the most expert hands are permitted to touch it, for since the early days of the war it has been utterly irreplaceable in Russia.

The method at The Bat is simply the method of Balieff's personality. Everything that reaches the

public across its stage passes through that prism. Around him he has gathered a group of congenial and sympathetic advisers, including the composer, Alexei Arhangelsky; Ryabtseff, comedian of the Ballet; and Burdzhaloff, of the Art Theatre, but he is the presiding genius of the junta. The spirit of The Bat is the spirit of wit and not the spirit of horseplay. Even wit sometimes retires in favor of a surpassing bit of poetic or tragic beauty. A typical programme consists of several songs in costume or in character with slight but eloquent backgrounds; a farce or two played with the earnestness of all good farce; a moment with marionettes; a scene or a short play from Pushkin or Gogol or Gorky; and, most characteristic of all, an exciting quarter hour in which the host pokes first his easter-egg face and then his chunky body through the curtains and spars with the nimble tongues in the audience, an exciting variation of the monologue in American vaudeville.

The most impressive production at *Letutchaya Muish* while I was in Moscow, and the most unexpected from the superficial aspects of the *régisseur,* was that of Maxim Gorky's short play, "Mother." Telling the simple story of a youthful captive taken by the terrible Tamerlane and the successful plea of the boy's mother for his release, this bit of intense drama is far distant from the familiar style of Russia's master playwright of to-day. Balieff presents it between snatches of choral song. After the prelude, the black-robed singers divide to the right and left and

help to frame esthetically as well as physically the vivid and colorful scene and action.

Not less picturesque was Balieff's production of Pushkin's short drama, "The Fountain of Bakhchi-Sarai", with its impassioned Oriental atmosphere. Gogol's story, "How Ivan Ivanovitch Exchanged Words with Ivan Nikiforovitch", afforded ample incentive for the irrepressible humors of Balieff's players. Liuboff Stolitsa, author of "The Azure Carpet" at the Kamerny, was represented by a pleasantly cynical tale from the Arabian Nights, "The Mirror of the Virgin." And one of the lesser skits of Tchehoff, "The Entr'acte under the Divan", was played with much gusto. The Bat is particularly happy and in its proper mood in its frequent snatches and scenes from peasant and historic Russia. And the quaint and stately flavor of the songs and ballads of Glinka rouses an American's wonder why these musical treasures are not oftener heard on our concert stages.

Of all Balieff's players, Deykarhanova is the most engaging and the most versatile. From the pleading Mother in Gorky's short drama to a buxom *baba* singing of the inconvenience of railroad travel under the Revolution is a long step, but she takes it easily and gracefully. Hers is the most incisive gift of characterization in the company, and The Bat would indeed be blind without her.

Moscow playhouses are many and interesting outside the superior circle of the Art Theatre, the State Theatres, the Kamerny, the Theatre of Kommissar-

zhevsky and Balieff's *Letutchaya Muish.* The system of repertory prevails everywhere, even in the vaudevilles and cabarets, and in each of them three or four plays or programmes of varying merit may be observed each week, with additions to the repertory once or twice a month in the form of new productions or revivals from a previous season. From them a very good impression may be obtained of the seriousness with which the Russian takes his drama, for the feature which distinguishes their work from the superior circle is not their repertory so much as their less thorough and less imaginative settings, the inferiority of many of their actors and their lack of a definite theory of the theatre. Nevertheless, many an interesting evening can be spent in their auditoriums. I recall with especial pleasure a simple but moving and poignant production of Leonid Andreieff's early drama, " The Days of Our Life ", at the Theatre Korsha, one of the landmarks among Moscow playhouses.

A record of the Moscow theatres is not quite complete, either, without a word concerning Pavel Orlienieff, — he who brought his pupil, Alla Nazimova, to America a decade and more ago and was known to us as Paul Orleneff. Orlienieff is a restless soul. The restrictions of working in one theatre would irk him too much. And so he is one of the few foot-loose players of great ability in Russia. Occasionally he leases a theatre for a short period and settles down, and then he is off again, up and down the provinces. In a way, he is an actor's actor, for he is more highly

regarded among his fellow artists than he is by the theatregoing public, but that may be because he has never cultivated a permanent public. At any rate, the evening I saw him play Dostoievsky's "Crime and Punishment" at Youzhny's Variety Theatre in Moscow, almost all the leading artists of the city's theatres were in the audience, including Katchaloff and Mme. Knipper and many others from the Art Theatre.

Orlienieff himself is an actor of very great talent if not of genius. But his vagabond ways are disastrous to the unity of his company and the perfection of his ensemble. As a trainer of actors, he is named in Russia in the next rank after Stanislavsky. It is apparent to everyone in America now, as it was clear to many at the time, that his was the flame that lit up those early performances of Ibsen by Nazimova in this country. The farther the actress got from her preceptor and the rôles he had taught her, the more artificial she became. Orlienieff told me he longed to come to America again. But the way is long and rough these days, and I do not know whether he is a good enough vagabond to traverse it.

CHAPTER XIII

Meyerhold and the Theatre Theatrical

Meyerhold and Yevreynoff, — these were the two names that lured me from the comparative safety of Moscow to the uncertainties of Petrograd during those anxious days of February, 1918, when the gray hordes of the Germans were swarming on unimpeded toward the capital. The stages of Moscow are the Russian theatre in microcosm, — with two exceptions. The Art Theatre with its unique tradition and its unrivalled record; the Small State Theatre with its roots firmly grounded in the classic past; the Great State Theatre with its remarkable equipment of youthful genius in the Ballet; the eager enthusiasm of artistic revolt under Tairoff and Balieff and Kommissarzhevsky in their widely divergent institutions, — these stages and the theories of the men who dominate them seem, after several months of intimate contact with them, to tell the whole story of the contemporary Russian theatre.

Still, there were two exceptions. No one in Moscow could deny it, no matter how partisan was his interest in his own city's playhouses. The exceptions were so exceptional that their fame had travelled before the war to far-off America alongside that of Stanislavsky and the Art Theatre and the Ballet. Meyerhold

stood out in these rumors as the uncompromising foe of Stanislavsky and realism, the defender and practitioner of the theatre theatrical. Yevreynoff emerged dimly in the guise of a proponent of a new way of conceiving the theatre, monodrama. From my first consultation with Tardoff and my first visit to Stanislavsky's dressing room, these two names were spoken with respect wherever Russian artists gathered. Under the spell of the Moscow theatres, I had lingered in the Kremlin city almost four months. But a visit to Petrograd was essential, Germans or no Germans!

Mid-February, about a week before I finally made up my mind to go to Petrograd, the Kamerny held a kind of all-night fair, attended by almost the entire futurist colony of Moscow and many of the artists and poets and players, such as David Burliuk, "the father of Russian futurism"; Aristid Lyentuloff, who paints Kremlin cathedrals standing on their ears; and Vera Holodnaya, the brunette Mary Pickford of the Russian movies. Vassily Kamyensky was there, a handsome fellow in curly golden hair and a Roman stripe coat who has written a novel or two and several volumes of futurist verse. He is Yevreynoff's biographer, too, and from him I found that Nikolai Nikolaievitch had exchanged the black bread and the alarums of life in Petrograd for the well-fed peace of Sukhum-Kale on the Black Sea. But Meyerhold remained at his post, and besides I might trace out the trail of Yevreynoff in his absence.

My first evening in Petrograd, less than five hours

after my arrival, found me at the Alexandrinsky Theatre, the state-endowed home of the drama in the capital corresponding to the Small State Theatre in Moscow but not so conservative in its traditions. "*Revizor*" or "The Inspector General", Gogol's imperishable satire, was the play, and although Meyerhold was absent, my note of introduction to him from Tairoff readily admitted me. Obviously, the theatre was having a harder struggle against the difficulties of life in the capital, for the audience was inferior in numbers and in self-possession to those of Moscow. Obviously, too, Meyerhold had nothing to do with this production of "*Revizor*", for it was a rather ordinary example of realistic staging dignified only by the superior humors of Uraloff, the bluff comedian who a decade and more ago had played the same rôle of the town-bailiff in Moscow as a member of the Art Theatre company. Meyerhold, it appeared, was one of several *régisseurs* at the Alexandrinsky, and to make sure of seeing his work I must seek him out in person.

Running down a busy individual in Petrograd, with every one disconcerted by the German menace and with the necessity of establishing myself in reasonable safety in a strange and turbulent city was a harder task than working out diplomatic relations with the Moscow theatres after the Bolshevik Revolution. At noon of the third day, I found my quarry busy with a rehearsal at the Marinsky, for he sometimes turns for variety's sake from drama to the opera. Could I come back that evening? — he would have more time: this

was the note hurriedly pencilled on his card. And so while the plaintive melodies of Puccini's " La Bohème " drifted into the inner rooms of the *régisseur's* loge, I sat and talked for the first time with Vsevolod Emilyevitch Meyerhold.

It is easy to see at a glance why the theatre theatrical is the artistic gospel of Meyerhold. There is nothing theatrical about the man himself, — unless it be the huge, soft white collar around his slender neck, a matter of careless comfort as much as anything. He is too intense and earnest in his belief in the theatrical to toy with it. His acceptance of realism as a dramatic method during his collaboration with Stanislavsky in the early years of the Moscow Art Theatre was not the act of a dilletante any more than the advocacy of its opposite to-day. His revolt against the sterility of the Russian theatre of the nineteenth century was just as sincere as his revolt against the first means by which he hoped to correct the fault. He simply found that a certain honest cynicism in his nature refused to countenance the attempt to create illusion by the faithful and accurate representation of life.

All through the ten days that remained of my association with him, the artistic abstemiousness of the man stood out emphatically among his characteristics. His friends are not so much among those who talk about art as among those who practice it. He has particular regard for Miklashevsky, the leading Russian authority on the Italian *commedia dell' arte,* and a profound respect for Yevreynoff, whose revolt against

realism in the theatre has taken a different course than his own. And his constant companion in leisure as well as in work is the artist, Alexander Yakovlevitch Golovin, who has designed the scenery for almost all his productions at the state theatres in Petrograd during the last decade.

Once while the anxiety over the German advance was at its peak, I spent the evening at his home in a modern but modest apartment house out in the Sixth *Rota* in the southern part of the city. The front stairway was locked and barred and under guard for the night, and after satisfying the watchman I made my way upward through a rear entrance to the four or five rooms where he and Mme. Meyerhold, a practical consort, have their home. Fred Gray, a former correspondent of *The London Daily Mail* who had been decorated with the St. George's Cross for bravery at the front, was present with his Russian wife. And so was Golovin, one of the gentlest artist souls I have ever known. Spread out on a table in a small studio lined with book shelves were the artist's designs and the producer's plans for some future production of Stravinsky's first lyric drama, *"Le Rossignol"*, which other European capitals had heard under Diagileff but which Petrograd had been denied by the conservatism of the Tsar's court. Around a simple board in the living room we sat informally over our tea and the bread with which Mme. Meyerhold honored my visit, and we talked of the hardness of life and the uncertainty of the times but most of all of the certainty of

the theatre and the persistence of art through the most bitter ordeals. I must remain, they all agreed, at least until I could see the revival of Molière's " Don Juan ", the production by which in November, 1910, Meyerhold introduced a new tradition in the state theatres.

A dress rehearsal of " Don Juan " was scheduled for Saturday morning, March 2, preparatory to the public disclosure the following Tuesday evening. I decided to attend as a precaution against the possible necessity of flight before Tuesday. Until the actors came, Meyerhold and Golovin waited with me in the greenroom of the Alexandrinsky amid the relics and memorials of almost a century of the Russian stage, for the theatre was built from Rossi's designs in 1832 and named after the wife of Tsar Nicholas I. The more I saw of Golovin, the more I was charmed by his spirit, as beautiful and simple as the soul of a child. Meyerhold's spirit is equally fine, but he is more aggressive and he takes the lead in their collaboration. When the rehearsal finally began, he pushed it through with assurance and precision, often leaping up on the extended apron and playing a part himself as an example for the actor. In between the acts, we adjourned briefly to the refreshment room for a glass of tea and a shaving of black bread in lieu of a sandwich. When the rehearsal was over and we emerged in the Nevsky Prospekt, a score of shots rang out in the block opposite the small shops of the Gostinny Dvor where a long queue waited with mixed patience for permission to leave the city. It seemed like a far cry from Mo-

lière and the good will of the artists to the seething excitement of out-of-door Petrograd. I do not wonder which was the real Russia, the Russia which will live on into the generations ahead.

"Don Juan" in rehearsal was antic and jolly. In performance, it was sheer joy, — the joy of the theatre as theatre. You face Meyerhold's stage with no illusion that it is not a stage. Of course it is a stage! Why pretend it isn't? There it is, under the full lights of the auditorium, curtain removed and apron extended twenty feet beyond the proscenium arch. It's a play you shall see, a *play,* you who love the theatre for its own sake! No cross-section of life here, no attempt to copy life! No illusion here, to be shattered by the slightest mishap or by a prosaic streak in the spectator's make-up. It's a play you shall see, and you'll know it all the time, for you'll play, too, whether you realize it or not. The audience is always an essential factor in the production of drama, but never does it enter so completely, so keenly into the psychological complex as in the theatre theatrical. The give and take between audience and actor is dynamic and almost incessant.

Into this theatre and to this stage, Meyerhold brings a play from out of an epoch which produced its drama in almost identically the same spirit of disillusioned make-believe. "On the extreme west", he writes in commenting on his production of "Don Juan", "in France and Italy, Spain and England, and on the extreme east in Japan, within the limits of one epoch (the

Photograph by the Author

ALEXANDER YAKOVLEVITCH GOLOVIN (AT THE LEFT), PAINTER, AND VSEVOLOD EMILYEVITCH MEYERHOLD, RÉGISSEUR, IN THE GREEN ROOM AT THE ALEXANDRINSKY THEATRE, PETROGRAD, MARCH, 1918

SETTING FOR ACT I

SETTING FOR ACT IV

SCENE DESIGNS BY GOLOVIN FOR MEYERHOLD'S PRODUCTION OF THE OPERA, "THE STONE GUEST," TEXT BY PUSHKIN AND SCORE BY DARGOMUIZHSKY, AT THE MARINSKY THEATRE, PETROGRAD

second half of the sixteenth and the whole of the seventeenth century), the theatre resounds with the tambourines of pure theatricality. . . . The academic theatre of the Renaissance, unable to make use of the greatly extended forestage, removed the actor to a respectable distance from the public. . . . Molière is the first of the masters of the stage of the era of Louis XIV to bring the action forward from the back and the middle of the stage to the forestage, to the very edge of it. . . .

"Is it not intelligible why every incident of any scene of that brilliant theatrical epoch took place on this wonderful spot called the forestage? . . .

"Similar to the arena of a circus, pressed on all sides by a ring of spectators, the forestage is brought near the public, so that not one gesture, not one movement, not one glimpse of the actor should be lost in the dust of the back stage. And see how thoughtfully tactful are these gestures, movements, postures and grimaces of the actor on the forestage. Of course! Could an actor with an inflated affectation or with insufficiently flexible bodily movements be tolerated at the proximity to the public at which the forestages of the old English, French, Spanish and Japanese theatres placed their actors?"

In approaching the problem of producing a play from the old theatre, Meyerhold admits that there is no need for the exact reproduction of the architectural peculiarities of the old stages. Free composition in the spirit of the primitive stage will serve, provided the

substance of the architectural peculiarities most suited to the spirit of the production is retained. What is more important, he thinks, is to determine whether the play in hand is one which can be comprehended by the contemporary spectator through the prism of his own time, or whether it will convey its idea only when the conditions and the atmosphere surrounding the original players and playhouse and audience are reproduced to-day. Such a play as the latter, he insists, is Molière's "Don Juan."

"Therefore", he writes in the critical essay on his production quoted before, "the *régisseur* who approaches the staging of 'Don Juan' must first of all fill the stage and the hall with such an atmosphere that the action could not be understood except through the prism of that atmosphere. . . . It is necessary to remind the spectator during the whole course of the play of all the thousands of looms of the Lyonnaise factories preparing the silks for the monstrously numerous courtiers of Louis XIV; of the Gobelin hotel; of the town of painters, sculptors, jewellers and turners; of the furniture manufactured under the guidance of prominent artists; of all those masters producing mirrors and laces according to the Venetian models, stockings according to the English model, cloth according to the Dutch model, and tin and copper according to the German.

"Hundreds of wax candles in three chandeliers from above and in two candlesticks on the forestage; little negroes filling the stage with stupefying perfumes,

dripping them from a cut-glass flask on heated platinum plates; little negroes flitting on the stage here to pick up a lace handkerchief from the hands of Don Juan or there to push the chairs before the tired actors; little negroes tying the ribbons on the shoes of Don Juan while he is having a discussion with Sganarelle; little negroes handing the actors lanterns when the stage is submerged in semi-darkness; little negroes clearing away from the stage the mantles and the sabers after the desperate fight between Don Juan and the brigands; little negroes crawling under the table when the statue of the Commander comes on the stage; little negroes calling the public together by ringing a little silver bell and in the absence of the curtain announcing the intermissions, — these are not tricks created for the diversion of the snobs; all this is in the name of the main object of the play: to show the gilded Versailles realm veiled with a perfumed smoke.

" The more sharply Molière's temperament as a comedian stood out amid the Versailles affectation, the more we expect from the wealth, the splendor and the beauty of costumes and accessories, although the architecture of the stage may be extremely simple."

And why is the curtain removed for " Don Juan " at the Alexandrinsky? The play was not so presented either at the Palais Royal or at the Petit Bourbon. " The spectator is usually coldly inclined," the producer answers, " when he looks at the curtain, no matter how well painted it is nor by what great master. The spectator has come to the theatre to see what is behind the

curtain; until it is lifted, he contemplates the idea of the painting on the curtain indifferently. The curtain is lifted, and how much time will pass until the spectator will absorb all the charms of the milieu surrounding the personages of the play? It is different when the stage is open from beginning to end, different under a peculiar kind of pantomime by the supernumeraries who are preparing the stage before the eyes of the public. Long before the actor appears on the stage, the spectator has succeeded in breathing in the air of the period."

Further, concerning the illuminated auditorium, Meyerhold writes: "It is unnecessary to immerse the hall in darkness either during the intermissions or during the course of the action. Bright light infects the playgoers with a festal mood. When the actor sees the smile on the lips of the spectator he begins to admire himself as if before a mirror."

Meyerhold's facile invention and his instinct for the elements of the dramatic are evident throughout the production of "Don Juan." In addition to solving the secret of the means wherewith to make the play live to-day with the same zest as at its original performance, he has devoted to every scene a mind alert for those eloquent but uncatalogued nuances and emphases by which a producer heightens the dramatic effect of a play. Such methods are particularly suitable in the theatre theatrical, for it lives and thrives on artifice contrived with skill and imagination. In Don Juan's scene with the peasant girls, for instance, Meyerhold

has developed the amusing series of asides to first one girl and then the other in such a way that Juan describes a kind of fantastic geometric figure in his dual conversation. It is all highly artificial, just like Molière's language in the scene, but it is also highly amusing and even mildly exciting in its stimulus to our sense of gesture. By an equally adroit use of suspense, the arrival of the Statue at the feast is built up in a combined spirit of awe and droll extravagance which leaves the spectator in that baffled mood which Meyerhold and even Molière, it would seem, deliberately sought.

Golovin's scenery is responsible for a large measure of the unity and decisiveness of the impression which "Don Juan" gives at the Alexandrinsky. America and the capitals of Europe are acquainted with the artist almost solely through the fantastic and sky-searching castles of his background for Stravinsky's ballet, "*L'Oiseau de Feu*", in the Diagileff repertory. In "Don Juan" he works in a wholly different mood. The precision of artifice takes the place of free fancy. I was unable to obtain adequate reproductions of the settings for the Molière version of the legend, but Golovin, in collaboration with Meyerhold, translated the Pushkin-Dargomuizhsky operatic reading of the Don Juan chronicle, "The Stone Guest", to the stage of the Marinsky in much the same mood, and I am presenting two scenes from that production. The design for Act IV is especially reminiscent of the decorative effect of the "Don Juan" settings. The whole

outward investiture of costume and scenery is tapestry in texture; the note of applied design dominates the composition; and yet there is a fine freedom and carelessness in the application which enables the outward dressing to merge in spirit with the plastic action of the play.

I am not sure what is the final impression left by "Don Juan" at the Alexandrinsky. I do not think it is entirely the impression of Molière. Or of Louis le Grand. Certainly it is only remotely that of the Sicily which the playwright designated as its locale. Neither is there anything specifically Russian in the intellectual or emotional record left by the play. I suppose that record includes something of all these forces, — filtered and fused through the creative imagination of Meyerhold, to the end that joy may be the lot of him who submits himself to its spell.

The history of Meyerhold's "Don Juan" is typical of all such productions in the Russian theatre. It was not conceived for a night or a season but for a generation. Revealed for the first time on November 22, 1910, it was played from twenty-five to thirty times during that season. Since then, it has been revived occasionally during three seasons, — 1911–1912, 1913–1914 and 1918. The opening performance of the latest revival, which I saw, was the forty-second in order from the start. They do not drive beauty to an early grave in Russia! Nor do they disarrange a work of dramatic art any more than is necessary through the exigencies of time. Of fourteen named rôles in the

play, nine were played in March, 1918, by the same actors as in November, 1910.

Meyerhold's contempt for realism in the theatre and for the intimate theatre which is, perhaps, the final development of realism, is nowhere more pointedly expressed than in his attack upon the production of "The Cricket on the Hearth" at the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre. The criticism appeared early in 1915 in his occasional periodical of the theatre, The Journal of Doctor Dapertutto, under the title, "'The Cricket on the Hearth' or At the Keyhole", and it leads off with these lines from Gogol's play, "The Wedding":

KOTCHKARYOFF — But what is she doing now? Why, this door must lead to her bedroom. (*He goes near the door.*)

FEKLA (*a woman*) — You impudent fellow! You are told that she is still dressing.

KOTCHKARYOFF — What of it! What's the difference? I shall only peep in and nothing more. (*He looks through the keyhole.*)

ZHEVAKIN — Let me look in, too.

YAITCHNITSA — Let me look in, too, only one little peep.

KOTCHKARYOFF (*continuing to peep in*) — Why, there is nothing to be seen, gentlemen! You can't distinguish anything. Something white is appearing, a woman or a pillow. (*All come to the door, however, and scramble to peep in.*)

"This fragment," writes Meyerhold, "contains all that I wish to say about the public which finally has found an ideal theatre for itself." And later, after a

scathing indictment of the intimate theatre and its realism as a surrender to the morbid human curiosity concerning life, he writes: "We prefer the theatre with art but without a public to the theatre with a public but without art. For we know that after all had rushed to the door and tried to peep through the keyhole, Kotchkaryoff came with the news, 'Sh! Somebody's coming!' and every one jumped away from the door. To every shamelessness there is a limit."

The wealth of dramatic methods and motives which Meyerhold opposes to realism is limited only by the bounds of the most restless fancy. Rejected as a mere means of copying life, the simplest and most homely details take on new significance as they are molded in the theatre into a new world of the imagination. From a prospectus of his Studio, which aims mainly "to develop in the actors the mastery of movement in conformity with the platform where the play goes on", I take these phrases, which indicate roughly the new implications which ordinary acts and facts may be made to assume: "The meaning of the 'refusal'; the value of the gesture in itself; the self-admiration of the actor in the process of acting; the technique of using two stages, the stage and the forestage; the rôle of the outcry in the moment of strained acting; the elegant costume of the actor as a decorative ornament and not a utilitarian need; the headgear as a motive for the stage bow; little canes, lances, small rugs, lanterns, shawls, mantles, weapons, flowers, masks,

noses, etc., as apparatus for the exercise of the hands; the appearance of objects on the platform and further destiny in the development of the subject dependent on these objects; large and small curtains (permanent and sliding, curtains in the sense of 'sails') as the simplest method of changes; screens and transparencies as a means of theatrical expressiveness; gauzes in the hands of the servants of the forestage as a means of underlining the separate accents in the playing of the leading actors, — in their movements and conversations; parade as a necessary and independent part of the theatrical appearance; various forms of parade in conformity with the character of the general composition of the play; geometrization of the design into the *mise en scène,* created even *ex improviso;* the mutual relation of the word and gesture in existing theatres and in the theatre to which the Studio aspires."

Naturally, the process of reconstructing the theatre theatrical has been slow and evolutionary after the first revolutionary break with the standards of realism. Even the rediscovery of the principles which guided it in its elder incarnation has been achieved by trial and experiment, and the newer principles growing out of the richer mechanical endowment and the broadened and deepened psychological horizon of our time require even more patient testing. It would be interesting, if possible, to compare Meyerhold's original revival of "Don Juan" with its aspects to-day, in order to see wherein he has acquired a firmer grip on the details of a technique which is still in the making.

Meyerhold as an artist of the theatre has travelled far since as a young man he originated the rôle of Treplieff in Tchehoff's "The Sea Gull" at the Moscow Art Theatre in December, 1898, and that of Baron Tuzenbach in "The Three Sisters" in February, 1901. After his break with Stanislavsky and realism, and a series of independent productions in Poltava and other cities in the south of Russia, he became *régisseur* for the Theatre of Vera Kommissarzhevskaya in Petrograd from the autumn of 1906 through the winter of 1907–1908, one of the most notable episodes of the modern Russian stage in spite of its brief life. For her he produced a wide range of plays, including Youshkyevitch's "In the City"; Pshibuishevsky's "The Endless Story"; Maeterlinck's "Sister Beatrice" and "Pelléas and Mélisande"; Alexander Blok's "The Little Booth"; Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "The Marriage of Zobeide"; Ibsen's "A Doll's House"; Andreieff's "The Life of Man"; Wedekind's "The Awakening of Spring"; and Sologub's "The Triumph of Death." In the autumn of 1908, he went to the imperial theatres of Petrograd, the Alexandrinsky and the Marinsky, where for a decade he has been the most influential and distinguished of their staff of *régisseurs*. His productions there have been many and varied, including Knud Hamsun's "At the Tsar's Door"; Wagner's "Tristan and Isolde"; Molière's "Don Juan"; Musorgsky's "Boris Godunoff"; Byelyaieff's "The Red Tavern"; Tolstoy's "The Living Corpse"; Gluck's "Orpheus"; Sologub's "Host-

ages of Life"; "Maskarad" by Lyermontoff and Glazunoff; "Elektra" by von Hofmannsthal and Strauss; Gluck's "Queen of the May"; "The Stone Guest" by Pushkin and Dargomuizhsky; Rimsky-Korsakoff's "*Snyegurotchka*" or "The Snow Maiden"; and Ostrovsky's "The Thunderstorm." In all these productions of his decade and a half as *régisseur,* Meyerhold has commanded the services of the leading artists of Russia for his scenic backgrounds. Many moods and many men, is the story of his collaboration. In recent seasons, he has worked almost solely with Golovin, but the list of those who preceded Golovin presents such names as Anisfeld, Bondy, Sudeykin, Kulbin, Shervashidze, Korovin, Sapunoff, Bilibin, Denisoff and Dobuzhinsky.

In the controversy between the players and A. V. Lunatcharsky, Bolshevik *Kommissar* of Education in charge of the state theatres, which rent the peace of those institutions in Petrograd through the winter of 1917–1918, Meyerhold held aloof. He was extremely reticent in conversation concerning his political convictions, and I am not at all sure where his sympathies lie. While some of the leading artists refused to work under the new régime, Meyerhold went energetically about his tasks as *régisseur* as if there had been no change in governmental authority. If he chafed under the awkwardness of some of the new regulations, he was too shrewd to confess it. With his sensitive nature and his keen imagination, he combines a practical understanding of human affairs, and he knows

that as the world runs to-day the artist should be happy if he is simply permitted to go ahead with his work, even if meddlesome officials of Tsar or of Soviet interpose in the matter of mechanism.

CHAPTER XIV

Yevreynoff and Monodrama

Of all the notable figures of the contemporary Russian theatre, the only one whom I had to cultivate by proxy was Nikolai Nikolaievitch Yevreynoff. Fortunately for the completeness of my record, this anarch of the drama and proponent of a new way of thinking the theatre has written voluminously of his aims and his theories and has stimulated others by the virility of those theories to write about him. Soon after I had settled down in Moscow, I found in one of the book stores the third volume of his "*Teatr dlya Syebya*", "The Theatre for One's Self." Volumes one and two were out of print, and a diligent search through the second-hand stalls failed to disclose them. Kamyensky's biography, "The Book about Yevreynoff", was out of print, too, but I turned up a copy in a little shop in the Leontyevsky Pereulok.

In Petrograd I fared better. From the publisher, Mme. Butkovskaya, I obtained the first volume of "The Theatre for One's Self" and some of the earlier plays, but no amount of coaxing could extract from the shelves the last remaining copy of the second volume. Russian good will, however, came to my rescue, for one evening Meyerhold broke his set and graciously

presented to me his own copy. "There will be another edition — some day. And I shall be here where it will be easy to replace it," he said. And then, by sheer chance, during those frantic days of February and March, 1918, while the Germans were pounding at the door of the capital, I came to know briefly but intimately Natalia, the charming sister of Nikolai, and from her I rounded out the data regarding her absent brother which I had already obtained from Kamyensky's monograph and from conversations in Moscow with the biographer.

Nikolai Nikolaievitch is in his early prime, for he was born February 26, 1879, and yet he has accomplished already a lifetime of work. From his first visit to a playhouse at the age of five, when he saw "Giroflé-Girofla" at Yekaterinburg, he was lured to the stage, and he straightway established his own theatre in his home. There at the age of seven he produced his first dramatic composition, "A Dinner with the Minister of State." Music attracted him, too, and he soon became an expert on the flute. At the gymnasium in Pskoff, he won a reputation as a humorist and he read much, falling under the influence of Mayne Reid and writing his first novel at the age of thirteen. About this time, too, he joined a circus and performed as an equilibrist near Pskoff under the pseudonym of Boklaro, remaining with the troupe when it played at the School of Law in Petrograd the following autumn. When he was fourteen, he acted in a theatre in Pskoff under the name of Gorkin. In the seventh class of the

gymnasium he conceived a plan to flee to America, but he had been deeply impressed by reading Stanley's African travels, and when he found how many others were going to America, he changed his scheme and for the sake of originality substituted Africa for the western hemisphere.

The family now moved to a *datcha* or summer home at Pushkino near Moscow, and Nikolai surrendered his dreams of adventure to go to the School of Law in Petrograd, where he soon found outlet for his instinct for the theatre in the Legal Dramatic Circle. There he appeared in "The Robbers" and played the rôle of Glumoff in Ostrovsky's "Enough Stupidity in Every Wise Man." There, too, he produced his own play, "The Rehearsal", and his first serious musical composition, the opera "The Power of Magic." His father, a narrow-minded *tchinovnik* or petty official, refused longer to support him, and so Nikolai went to Libau to teach, continuing his legal studies in Petrograd at intervals. He wrote another play at the age of twenty-one, "Fools as Blind Idols", and then in the following year, 1901, he was graduated from the law school with a silver medal. A post in the Ministry of Ways and Communications thenceforth for the next decade kept him financially independent and gave him time to continue his studies and his writing and to direct his own plays and those of others in the Petrograd theatres.

In music, Yevreynoff's master at the Conservatory was Rimsky-Korsakoff; in history at the University,

G. I. Senigoff; and in philosophy, Arsenius Vvedensky. From the age of fifteen he had tended toward atheism in his beliefs, and at eighteen he was deeply affected by reading Nietzsche. The death of a friend when he was twenty brought about a reaction, and under the influence of Prince V. Y. Golitsuin he became a close student of the Gospels.

In the decade following his graduation from the University, Yevreynoff's activity in the theatre steadily increased. In 1902, he wrote a three-act comedy, "The Foundation of Happiness", an episode in the life of gravediggers, produced in 1905 at the New Theatre in Petrograd with L. V. Yavorsky in the leading rôle. A one-act comedy, "Styopik and Manyourotchka", was written and played in 1905 at the Alexandrinsky Theatre, and "The Handsome Despot" at the Small Theatre in Petrograd in 1906. Yavorsky presented his "War" in Tiflis and elsewhere. Still other compositions of the period from 1904 to 1906 were "Grandmother", published in the newspaper *Novoe Vremya* and played for the first time at the Marinsky in 1907; "Plutus" of Aristophanes, adapted to contemporary conditions; and "Such a Woman", produced in 1908 at the Small Theatre in Petrograd. Some of the more important plays of this earlier period were gathered together in a volume in 1907: "The Foundation of Happiness", "Styopik and Manyourotchka", "The Handsome Despot" and "War." And in the same year he led in the founding of the *Starinny Teatr* or Old Theatre, of which he was *régisseur* during the seasons of

1907–1908 and 1911–1912 and where his aim was to restore the old historic Russian stage.

Recognition of Yevreynoff's growing importance came when he was chosen in 1908 as the successor to Meyerhold in the post of *régisseur* of Vera Kommissarzhevskaya's theatre in Petrograd. For her, during the season of 1908–1909, he produced "Francesca da Rimini", Sologub's "Vanka the Butler and Page Jean" and Oscar Wilde's "Salome", removed by the police from the repertory after the dress rehearsal. In the spring of 1909, Yevreynoff joined with Fyodor Kommissarzhevsky, the actress's brother, in organizing the Gay Theatre for Grown-up Children in Petrograd, where he produced his harlequinade, "Gay Death." In the same year he made his first experiment with the nude on the stage by producing Sologub's "Night Hops", in which a number of well known poets and artists took part, and later he took charge of several private productions for the circle of Baroness Budberg in Moscow. His work in the theatre now occupied most of his time and in the fall of 1910 he left his position in the Ministry of Ways and Communications and became principal *régisseur* of the theatre *Krivoye Zerkalo* or the Crooked Looking-Glass, where he remained actively in charge until the spring of 1914 and with which he retained an interest until he left for the Caucasus in the winter of 1917–1918.

During these years, too, he had been teacher, musician, composer and artist. From 1908 to 1911 he directed a dramatic studio in Petrograd in which his task

had been to develop the theatrical intellectuality, the technique, the taste and the musical and plastic execution of the artists for the Theatre of the Future. As an artist, he contributed in the spring of 1910 a futurist painting, "The Dancing Spaniard", to the exhibition *Treugolnik,* or Triangle, founded by N. I. Kulbin. As a composer he added to his earlier work an opera bouffe, "The Rape of the Sabine Women"; a lyric-naturalistic opera, "Sweet Cake", produced at the Crooked Looking-Glass in November, 1912; an operetta unusual in musical design, "The Fugitive", produced at the Palace Theatre in Petrograd in November, 1913; a group of Second-Polkas; a Lullaby, a friendly parody on Chopin; and Strange Romances, a series of songs. Other diversions were the preparation of a record which he called "Serf Actors" and a "History of Corporal Punishment in Russia", the composition of a Monograph on Aubrey Beardsley for a series published by Mme. Butkovskaya, and the publication under his editorship of "The Nude on the Stage."

The idea of monodrama as a new way of conceiving the theatre began to take form in Yevreynoff's mind over a decade ago. "An Introduction to Monodrama", first published in Petrograd by Mme. Butkovskaya in 1909, was originally read by the author before the Literary and Artistic Circle in Moscow, December 29, 1908, and in Petrograd in the Theatre Club, March 6, and in the theatre of Vera Kommissarzhevskaya, March 17, 1909. His first play embodying his new theory of the drama was "The Representation of

Love", produced at the Studio of the Impressionists in Petrograd in 1910. In 1912, another monodrama was disclosed on the stage of the Crooked Looking-Glass, "The Greenroom of the Soul", or "The Theatre of the Soul", as some have translated it, in which the action takes place in the chest of the body. In the same year, too, appeared his *bouffonnerie* on "*Revizor.*"

The development of the theory of monodrama proceeded, and in 1913 Mme. Butkovskaya published for Yevreynoff his "*Teatr kak Takavoi*" ("The Theatre as Such"), with illustrations drawn by Kulbin. This volume dealt with the theatricalization of life and advanced the view that the inborn instinct of theatricality lives beside that of self-preservation and sex, etc.; that the uprooting of this instinct is equal to physical castration; that the satisfaction of this instinct is one of the eudynamic stages, so far as happiness is understood to be one of the needs of the soul; and that man is touched to the quick only by that which he is able to theatricalize. The dialectic was carried still farther in the fall of 1913 by the publication of "*Pro Scena Sua.*"

In 1914 there appeared the second volume of his collected plays, the more important ones which had gathered since the publication of the first volume in 1907. The volume includes: "The Fair at the Indiction of St. Denis"; "Unalterable Treason"; "Three Sorcerers", produced December 20, 1907, at the Old Theatre in Petrograd; "Such a Woman", produced September

15, 1908, at the Small Theatre in Petrograd; "Grandmother", produced February 9, 1907, at the Marinsky Theatre; and "Gay Death", produced April 13, 1909, at the Gay Theatre, and revived in November, 1911, at the Liteiny Theatre and in November, 1912, at the Theatre Nezlobina in Petrograd.

The full and complete development of Yevreynoff's theory of monodrama as well as his critical opinion of all other forms of the theatre and their apologists is contained in the three volumes of his greatest work in dialectic, "*Teatr dlya Syebya*" ("The Theatre for One's Self"), the first of which was published by Mme. Butkovskaya in 1915, the second in 1916 and the third after the Revolution in 1917. The first volume is characterized by the author as "theoretical", the second as "pragmatical" and the third as "practical." For its daring and confident advocacy of a new way of thinking the theatre, for the breadth of its knowledge of the drama and the theatre in all countries and all times, for its eager enthusiasm in the theatre and for its whimsical imagination, it is the most important contribution to the discussion of the drama since Craig published "On the Art of the Theatre." No summary, no characterization can do it justice. It must be translated and published in full before its import can be appreciated. Weathering the storms of war and revolution which broke over Russia with a fury incomprehensible to us, "The Theatre for One's Self" overcame all odds and found its way to type and to the debate and discussion which follow type. For us, it

remains an untapped reservoir, big with inspiration for the few and with exasperation for the many, for Nikolai Nikolaievitch Yevreynoff smashes idols with the courteous ruthlessness of Edward Gordon Craig.

With his fecund pen, Yevreynoff has always kept far ahead of his publisher. As a result, he has ready for the printer the manuscripts for an exhaustive survey of scenic setting, "Russian Theatrical Decorative Art", to be completed in five volumes with illustrations under the editorial supervision of Mstislaff Valerianovitch Dobuzhinsky; the first volume of "The Russian Ceremonial Theatre", connected with "the dressed-up goat and the origin of ancient Russian tragedy"; "A Manuscript Concerning Portrait Painters", treating the problem of subjectivism in art; "The Distress of a Gentleman", a novel; "An Exposition of Art", an esthetic treatise; and a third volume of his collected dramatic compositions to include "The Greenroom of the Soul", the burlesque on "*Revizor*", "The Kitchen of Laughter", "The Fourth Wall" and "The School of the Stars."

Of all Yevreynoff's prolific output, only a small fraction has been made available in other languages. So far as I have been able to discover, the only published translations of his plays or his dialectics are as follows: "The Greenroom of the Soul" into English, French and German; "Gay Death", the harlequinade, into English and German; "Such a Woman" into German; and "An Introduction to Monodrama" into English.

Although he had to forego his dreams of adventurous travel in his early youth, Yevreynoff in recent years has wandered zealously. He attended the International Exposition in Rome in 1910 and saw Naples, Vienna and Berlin on the way. The wild tribes of Morocco were his haunt in 1913, whence he went by way of France and Spain. Once more in the following year he went to Africa, visiting Constantinople, Smyrna and Athens en route and traversing Egypt from Cairo to Luxor. He has not neglected his own country, for in search of the native folk drama of his race he has travelled from Archangel to Astrahan. In the summer of 1914, he penetrated to the secluded parts of the governments of Kursk and Oryol and Tamboff, where he studied the ceremonial rites and games in preparation for "The Russian Ceremonial Theatre", the idea for which he gained at the age of twenty, when he was invited as best man to the wedding of a friend in the country near Tver. Ever since then, one of his most ardent dreams has been to bring about a creative rebirth of national Russian drama.

In his monograph, "An Introduction to Monodrama", Yevreynoff states clearly the fundamental purposes and aspects of his revolutionary way of thinking the theatre:

"The cornerstone of monodrama is the 'living experience' of the acting character on the stage resulting in the similar 'living experience' of the spectator, who through this act of 'coördinate living experience' becomes one with the acting character. . . .

"The task of monodrama is to carry the spectator to the very stage so that he will feel that he is acting himself. . . .

"The 'I' (the acting character) is a bridge from the auditorium to the stage. . . .

"The spectator must know from the programme with whom the author invites him to have a common life, in whose image he himself must appear."

In none of his volumes of dialectic, however, has Yevreynoff expressed so trenchantly the psychological basis and the inherent nature of monodrama as in the preface to his play, "The Representation of Love." Therefore, in lieu of a more personal analysis of the man and his work, denied me by his absence in the inaccessible Caucasus, I present a free translation of this preface, taken from the edition published in Moscow in 1910:

"This play is an experiment in monodrama. The latter, as an architectonic theory of the drama on a subjective impressionistic basis, came as a result of the plot of the play, not the contrary. It is not the theory which came before the artistic creation. I consider it necessary to make this observation in order to avoid the accusation of preparing a play according to formula. As it is known, many plays have been written according to my 'recipe' under the name of 'monodramas', but unfortunately many authors took up my theory superficially and in their productions only tried to be ahead of the fashion.

"I do not wish such followers.

" ' The Representation of Love ' is, indeed, the first example of an exactly constructed monodrama.

" I shall recall the most important of my teachings concerning monodrama.

" Our soul is limited in its capacity for receptivity. The foundation of esthetic contemplation is the concentration of the attention on some definite individual object. Moreover, the change of the objects of our concentration results in weariness of the soul-activity and consequently in the weakening of the capacity for receptivity. The real object of a dramatic representation ought to be some living experience, and with this, for the purpose of facilitating the receptivity, the living experience of one soul instead of several.

" Hence, the necessity for preferring one ' really acting ' protagonist to several ' equally acting ', — in other words, the logic of the demand for such an ' acting character ', in whom as in a focus should be concentrated the whole drama and therefore the living experience of the other acting characters.

" In addition, variety not unified splits the whole into several separate less strong impressions and this prevents the appearance of the most significant esthetic moment. Therefore, in art we must absolutely try to attain variety in unity, achieving in this way an easily conceived simplicity and thus a whole impression — an esthetic pledge — of the significant.

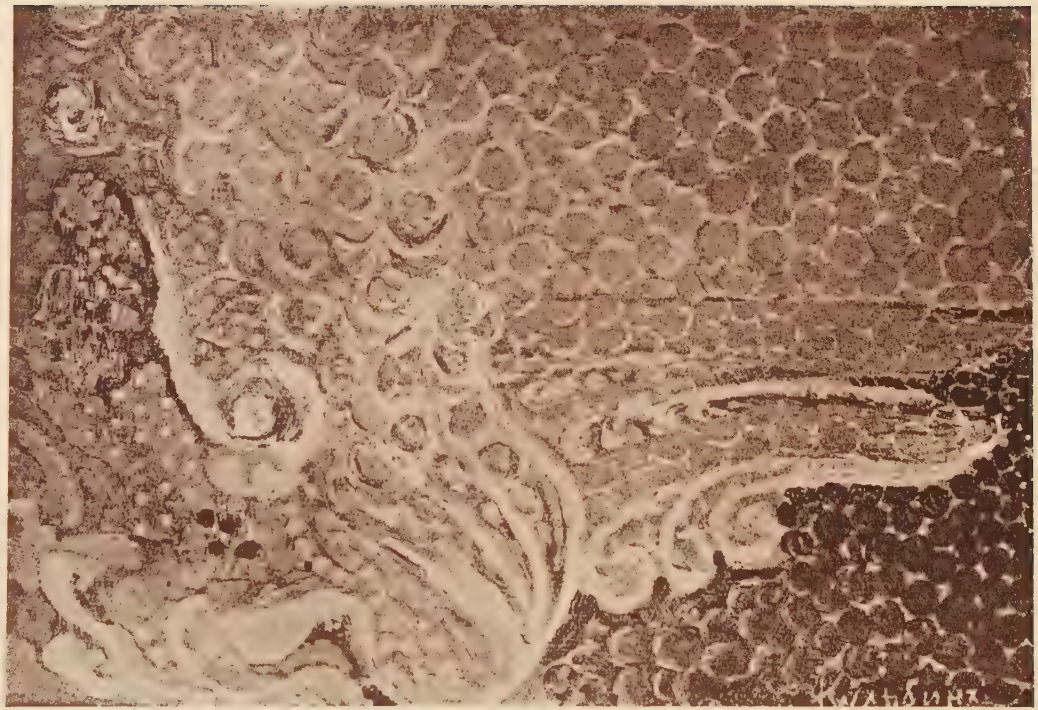
" What I have said indicates the steps to the perfect drama, — monodrama.

" I call monodrama the kind of a dramatic repre-

FROM A SKETCH BY ANNYENKOFF

FROM A SKETCH BY A. K. SHERVASHIDZE

TWO PORTRAITS OF NIKOLAI NIKOLAIEVITCH YEVREYNOFF, PLAYWRIGHT, PRODUCER AND PROPONENT OF MONODRAMA



▲ SCENE DESIGN BY THE ARTIST, N. I. KULBIN, FOR ACT II OF THE MONODRAMA, "THE REPRESENTATION OF LOVE," BY NIKOLAI NIKOLAIEVITCH YEVREYNOFF

The "I"—"Is it you I am embracing? . . . Yes? . . . Is your hair perfumed? . . . Do I hear your breath? . . . Yours? . . . Yes? . . . Yes, it is you, you! . . . You? . . . No, do not resist! . . . Listen, listen . . . (I still say something, but what,—I do not understand, I do not know, I do not hear. In the dark fog, still, there is distinct green gold . . . Either it curls or freezes on the spot . . . Envelopes, shrivels . . . Dies in a minute of darkness, comes to life again, grows pink, purple, makes odd designs, tinkles with opalescent murkiness, wafts an unearthly charm, rains, becomes an ocean, warms with colors)."

sentation which endeavors with the greatest fulness to communicate to the spectator the soul state of the acting character, and presents on the stage the world surrounding him as he conceives it at any moment in his stage experience. Instead of the old incomplete drama, I propose the architectonics of a drama based on the principle of identifying the stage with the representation of the acting character.

"The conversion of the theatrical spectacle into a drama depends on the living experience, the contagious character of which, calling forth in me a coördinate living experience, changes in the moment of the stage action a 'drama alien to me' into 'my own drama.'

"The stage means of expression of the dramatic experience are reduced, as we know, first of all to words. But the unsatisfactoriness of these means is evident; he who attentively analyzes himself in the parterre of the theatre acknowledges that we hear more with the eyes than with the ears; and this in my opinion is in the nature of the theatre.

"As Pshibuishevsky says, 'There is no possibility of expressing one's self in words.' There remain gestures, artistically expressive gesticulation, the tongue of movements common to all human races, mimicry in the broad sense of the word, that is, the art of reproducing with one's own body the movements expressing our agitations and feelings. Charles Aubert justly remarks that mimicry predominantly is the fundamental element of the theatre, as it represents by that means action, that is, the most evident part, the part best able

to produce an impression and the most contagious on the ground that the spectator seeing in the mimicry a picture of a more or less deep agitation is moved by the law of imitation to share and feel the same agitation, the signs of which he sees. And this last circumstance is the most essential in the theatre, because in bringing about a coördinate living experience with the acting character it establishes in this very way the change of the 'drama alien to me' into 'my own drama.' But even this powerful means of communion of the stage with the spectators is limited, as we know, in its potency.

"Thus we see productions in which the dramatist, unable to rely on the mimic art of the actor, adds in certain cases to the words of the most vivid expression and to the detailed directions for the mimicry of the main acting character, the object as a cause of the given words and the given mimicry in all the clearness of its stage personification. Thus in a whole series of dramas, classic as well as modern, the feeling of terror is sometimes suggested to the spectator not only by word and mimicry but by the very object of this terror — for instance, the ghost of this or the other image of hallucination. The object of the dramatist here is clear: in order that the spectator may have at a given moment nearly the same experience as the acting character, it is necessary that he see the same thing.

"In such cases there comes a moment which I would call monodramatic in spite of the lack of preparation and stage groundwork. Indeed, why is the spectator obliged suddenly to look upon that which only one act-

ing character sees and what the other personages of the drama do not notice in their terror at perceiving the disfigured features of the one who has seen the ghost? That is one point; in the second place, if the spectator must see only that which the terror-stricken individual sees, that is, the image of the ghost, why are the other acting characters shown to him, those personages whom the terror-stricken individual is psychologically not in a condition to see in all their clearness? Not only that, but why does the room or the plain or the forest — the place of the appearance of the ghost — not change at the moment of suggestion of terror in his features; why do the coloring and the light remain unchanged, just as if nothing had happened and, though seized with unspeakable fear, he continued to see their impassive contours?

"This is not yet monodrama. Monodrama must present the exterior spectacle in correspondence with the internal spectacle. This is the whole essence of it.

"Monodrama forces every one of the spectators to enter the situation of the acting character, to live his life, that is to say, to feel as he does and through illusion to think as he does. Consequently, first of all, it is necessary for him to see and to hear the same as the acting character. The cornerstone of monodrama is the living experience of the acting character on the stage dependent on the identical coördinate living experience of the spectator who by this act of coördinate experience becomes a similar acting character. To convert the spectator into an illusory acting character

is the important problem of monodrama. For this, there must be on the stage first of all only one subject of acting, and not only for the reasons that have been set forth in the beginning but also because monodrama has for its purpose to present such an external spectacle as will correspond to the inner spectacle of the subject of acting; for to be present at once at two spectacles is not within our weak powers.

" In order that the spectator should be able to say to himself on this or the other occasion together with the one acting on the stage ' Yes ' or ' No ', it is not sufficient for the spectator to see the eloquent figure of the actor, to hear his expressive voice and to know that it is he who speaks in the room. It is necessary further to show, at least by a hint, the relation of the actor to the surrounding setting. We often say ' Yes ' instead of ' No ' when the sun shines, but it shines sometimes in our soul more brilliantly than in the sky, and this sunshine, not less than the real sunshine, may lighten up with royal comfort our miserable setting. I may utter my ' Yes ' or ' No ' in deep meditation, distant in my thoughts from this setting. Then it is as if this setting would disappear; it veils itself by my indifference to it. Is it possible that Hamlet uttering ' To be or not to be ' sees at this moment the desperate luxury of the palace ornaments? And you, true people of the theatre, did you not become angry in such a moment at the intrusive brilliance of these requisites of luxury, at all this useless clearness of contours unintelligible to Hamlet?

" To every psychologist it is elemental that the world

surrounding us, thanks to the sense impressions, inevitably undergoes changes; and the idea that the object has in it inherently that which in reality it borrows from the impressionable subject is not some exceptional psychological phenomenon. All our sense activity is subject to the process of the projection of purely subjective changes upon the outside object. I do not know what is the color of cherries. I only know that in my eyes they are red. Do your eyes color them exactly in the same shade as mine? I do not know. I only know that the Daltonists color them in green. We seem to think that the world in itself is full of sounds, although the sounds as well as the colors are nothing else than our subjective transmutations of external facts. That which in inanimate objects suddenly stands out in the quality of animated force is not so strange according to the explanation of K. Groose, because this animated force is our own familiar 'I' with all its peculiarities; here, according to the just remark of Fisher, 'the borrowing of souls' goes on; we seem to loan the necessary particle of our soul to the object, inanimate by its nature, for the time of the impression.

"The surrounding world seems to borrow its character from the subjective individual 'I'; and we understand what Goethe meant in saying of Hebel that the latter gave nature a great deal of the 'peasant quality.' Nature can be peasant-like, when Hebel perceives it, but it can be chivalrously beautiful when Wolfram von Eschenbach perceives it. And it changes together with

us, with our soul-mood. The cheerful meadow, field and forest which I admire, sitting free from care beside my sweetheart, will become a bright green spot, yellow furrows, and dark age, only if at that moment I be notified of a misfortune that has happened to some one near to me. And the author of the perfect drama in the sense I understand it will fix in a remark these two moments of the setting surrounding us; pedantically he will demand from the decorator an instantaneous change of the cheerful landscape to a stupid combination of tiresome green, disquieting yellow and gloomy olive colors, and he will be right in his pedantry.

" The artist of the stage by no means should show on it in his ' drama ' the objects such as they are in themselves, — when they are represented as they are perceived, reflecting some ' I ', his torment, his joy, his wrath, his indifference, only then will they become organic parts of that desired whole which we truly have a right to call perfect drama. In expressing one's self imaginatively, the blood of the acting character must circulate in the objects on the stage and a very stony stone must not remain silent beside the acting character. The revolver when I admire it as a brilliant toy is not the same as when as a task I clean it for my master, and it is certainly not the same as when I take it up in order to shoot myself; on what ground on all these three occasions do they show me from the stage the same terribly coarse, meaningless weapon! Why, I was promised a drama and not merely a ' show ', was I not? I wish to live the same life with the acting

character — the moment of the deepest identity with him has come! So do not turn me aside, do not dampen my interest by showing me your 'criminal' properties!

"'But this is conventionality!' will cry out our theatrical air brakes, 'and a necessary conventionality which can not stand in the way of the spectator who has tuned his mind in unison with the soul of the acting character. Such a spectator who is meeting the design of the author sees the object in the real light, because he can easily imagine the aspect of the object just as it should be from the course of the play.' But in such a case, I answer, it is not necessary to show anything! It is much easier to imagine all this, if no obstacles are put in the way of the imagination!

"I repeat — we come to the theatre first of all as spectators, and then as listeners; and everything that is most essential we wish by all means to see, to contemplate with our bodily and our spiritual eye. Give us, then, this satisfaction, if it is a stage and not a pulpit nor a concert platform!

"In the end it must be clear to the dramatist that if he wishes to represent the life of the spirit, he must deal not with external realities but with the internal reflections of the real objects, because for the psychology of a given person his subjective perception of the real object is important but not the object in a relation indifferent to him.

"Thus far we have spoken of the decorative change, as of the natural result of a given emotion, of a given

soul-state which on stage presentation causes the spectator to have the desired fulness of coördinate living experience with the acting character. In this manner, the motive of the decorative metamorphosis must be understood. But some of our emotions, our feelings, are so tenaciously associated with this or the other characteristic of the surrounding setting that sometimes we find out the cause from the results.

" The psychologist Ribot in his teaching about character takes note of the following significant fact: 'If we assume for some time a sad pose we may feel that sadness has taken possession of us; in joining a cheerful company and imitating its external ways we can bring out in ourselves a momentary cheerfulness. If you give the hand of the hypnotized man a threatening position with a tightened fist, then as a complement to that position naturally comes a corresponding mimicry of the face and movements of other parts of the body. Here the cause appears as the motion and the result the emotion. In such a way, concludes Ribot, there exists an uninterrupted association between certain movements and emotions corresponding to them. Moreover, not only the definite emotions are capable of bringing out definite movements, but, on the contrary, some of the movements of the subject are capable of stirring up in the soul emotions corresponding to them. And I think that we shall not go out of the limits of experimental psychology if we shall apply the conception of 'movement' to the decorative changes in a monodramatic sense. And under these conditions the

gain in the economy of time — a circumstance extremely essential for the perfect drama — will be certain; instantly proceeding from the result to the cause, that is to say, from the given character of the setting to the soul-state of the acting-person which brings it about, the spectator sometimes will not need at all a verbal or a mimic introduction to the psychology of the acting character. Independently of the rapidity and the exactness, the original charm of such a shortened presentation of the living experience comes as an added merit of the monodramatic method.

" As explained above, all our sense activity is subjected to the process of projection of our purely subjective changes on the external object. In the category of this external object, monodrama understands not only the inanimate entourage of the acting character, but also the living persons surrounding him.

" As we already know, in the perfect drama, becoming 'my own drama', only one acting character is possible; in the strict meaning of the word only one subject of action is thinkable. Only with him do I identify myself, only from his point of view do I perceive the world surrounding him, the people surrounding him. In this manner, the latter must present themselves to us through the prism of the soul of the acting character himself; in other words, the spectator of the monodrama perceives the other participants in the drama as they are reflected in the subject of acting, and consequently, their living experience having no independent meaning on the stage, they seem important

only as much as in them is projected the perceiving 'I' of the subject of action. On this ground, we can not in monodrama recognize any importance in the other acting characters in the strict sense of the word, and we must in justice set them up as objects of action, understanding the word 'action' in the sense of the perception of them and the relations of the acting character to them. It is not important here what they say and how they say it, but that which the acting character hears. How they look by themselves remains concealed; we shall see them only in the aspects in which they present themselves to the acting character. It is quite possible that the latter will ascribe to them attributes which they would not have in our eyes. They will necessarily present themselves to us transformed. They will be unnoticed, they will be fused with the background or will be absorbed by it, if in this or in other moments they are indifferent to the acting character. They will efface with their appearance the whole setting if the acting character is entirely absorbed in looking at them. They are beautiful, intelligent and kind if the acting character conceives them as such at the moment, and they appear repulsively ugly if the acting character is disappointed in them and sees them from a different point of view.

"Finally, which is self-understood from the architectonics of monodrama, the acting character himself should appear before us such as he sees himself in any given moment of his stage action. Now, our bodily visibility we always consider as something both 'ours'

and at the same time as foreign to us; in this way we can consider ourselves differently. And this permanent or variable relation to one's own personality must certainly be clearly noted in monodrama equally with the other subjective representations of the main acting character.

"Among other things, monodrama solves one of the most burning problems of contemporary art, namely, the problem of the chilling and paralyzing and distracting influence of the footlights. To abolish the footlights in reality, as some propose, does not mean yet to abolish them in our imagination: bad experience will indeed compel us to recreate mentally the abolished border. It must be done so that the visible should become invisible, that the existing should be non-existing. And once the *régisseur* will attain fusion of the 'I' of the main acting character with the 'I' of the spectator by the illusory images of the main acting character, then the spectator, as if happening to find himself on the stage, that is, in the place of action, will lose sight of the footlights; they will remain behind him, in other words, they will destroy themselves.

"In speaking of the architectonics of drama on the principle of stage identity with the personification of the acting character, I underline the expression 'stage identity', as antithetical to the realistic identity, because I know very well that if the method of art generally presents the inevitable and at the same time desired simplification, then this remains steadfast for the art of the stage.

" In getting acquainted with ' The Representation of Love ', the reader must remember that in the stage directions of this monodrama are included only the main changes of the world surrounding the acting ' I '; the other changes (for instance, the almost uninterrupted shifting and changing of the decorations) must be understood by the reader according to the course of the play.

" In conclusion, this last reservation:

" In offering monodrama to the theatre as the drama most perfect in form, I by no means exclude by this form other dramatic representations. He who is acquainted with my ' Apology for Theatricality ' will certainly understand that side by side with ' my drama ' I can not help acknowledging also the ' spectacle foreign to me.' Of course, in this ' spectacle ' I see something far from the model of the contemporary stage. However, I shall speak about it in another place, because the study of a theatrical spectacle as of something satisfactory in itself, leads us into a domain somewhat different from monodrama, — to the esthetics of free stage arrangement."

CHAPTER XV

Russian Theories of the Theatre

The question of what is art and what is not and the various theories of art, and of the theatre in particular, engage the whole world of esthetics to-day, but nowhere is the controversy more intense than in Russia. Proponents and practitioners of the several theories have reached clearer conclusions and defend those conclusions more obstinately in Moscow and Petrograd than anywhere else. In the heat of this discussion and dialectic, the normal course for the creative artist is to choose that theory which permits the freest outlet for the expression of his imaginative impulse. Unless he be unusually versatile, he is wise in clinging to that manner of expression which is most natural to him, for an imposed virtuosity may endanger the effectiveness of those gifts which he possesses. The critic and the chronicler of the theatre, however, face the necessity of examining all theories and all manners impartially and of measuring them by the results which they yield.

The catholicity of the task prescribed for the critic is vividly sketched in a letter which a Hoosier friend once sent me. "Why all this jammering," he wrote, "as to whether art is Fujiyama seen through a mist or O'Toole's alley on a bright day? It may well be

either or anything between. It isn't hollering down a rain barrel or sniffing the pig pen, though there be them who like to holler and to sniff. The frontiers of art are about as fixed as the corona of the sun. Inside are Bach and Debussy and Piero di Cosimo and Whistler and Rodin and a trillion littlenesses and quaintnesses and vaguenesses and grandeurs. It's partly a matter of dietary. If I eat meat — the raw red steak of my uric acidulate countrymen — and wash it down with Java and prepare the scene with cocktails, esthetically I am not the same creature I was on milk and the material egg. The Japanese say our art is to them 'gymnastic.' Rice and fish and tea and preserved ginger and sea fogs and ancestor worship. Why quarrel with mean annual temperature, humidity, the neolithic mammals and the Mendelian law? I know you don't and I suppose it would spoil a lot of copy if we did it. Is it good of its kind and has the kind any human significance?"

The Russian theatre presents a fertile field for the exercise of such critical generosity and breadth of mind. The guest of its artists finds his mental balance severely tested by the eagerness with which each of the several schools seeks to convert him to be its particular apologist. It does not suffice, apparently, to acknowledge the justice and the plausibility of any given viewpoint; you must reject all other viewpoints as emphatically as do those who practice the theory in support of which your sympathy is sought. The singleness of purpose with which the creative artist works

finds it difficult to understand how the same mind can see truth in what he is doing as well as in the work of his most bitter opponent. Nevertheless, in spite of all these naïve efforts to corrupt me, I found truth and beauty in almost all of the contending camps of the Russian theatre.

In a detached and objective view of the contemporary Russian stage, three personalities and their esthetics stand out supreme in their clear-cut convictions, in their achievements and in their significance for any comprehensive conception of the art of the theatre; Stanislavsky, Meyerhold and Yevreynoff. Others, like Tairoff of the Kamerny, and Kommissarzhevsky and Youzhin, are necessary for the completion of the picture, but they contribute nothing so vital, so individual to that picture.

To Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre is due the recognition in Russia that there is a problem of the theatre. By a coincidence similar to the discovery of the theory of evolution by Darwin and Wallace, working independently of each other, the recognition of the existence of a problem of the theatre and the comprehension of its nature came almost simultaneously in the final decade of the nineteenth century to Craig in England, to Appia in Switzerland and to Stanislavsky in Russia.

Contrary to the course of Craig and Appia, who have devoted themselves almost wholly to the development of the theory of the problem, Stanislavsky has profited by the Russian encouragement of fresh artistic

vision and has spent his time in active experiment in the theatre. Of argument and dialectic he has produced a negligible quantity. For a long time he has been at work on a book embodying his conception of the theatre, but composition is slow and difficult. "I write one page a year," he says, "and then I tear it up!" His expression, he fears, is artificial, but in this he is probably as severe to himself as he is in his acting. Despite his literary diffidence, Stanislavsky is an intense propagandist for his theories, spreading them by personal contact rather than by the printed page. That is the reason why he plays less and less each season, for he feels it his duty to guide and influence others. Just as, in the early days of his career, the actor overshadowed the director, so now in recent seasons the teacher overshadows the actor.

Although, with Craig, Stanislavsky saw the problem of the theatre as a revolt against the dead artificiality of the stage of the nineteenth century, his revolt for the most part has taken a wholly different direction. Instead of trying to make the theatre more honestly theatrical, he has sought to eliminate from it all trace of the theatrical, to perfect its illusions in such a way as to make it more and more representative of life. Realism and representation, therefore, are his actuating theories, but he has understood from the start that realism which merely copies the external aspects does not represent life. There is a hidden, inner psychological realism or naturalism, a spiritualized realism, which is elusive and extremely difficult to attain but

which goes farther than the most faithful reproduction of exterior aspects toward achieving the illusion and the interpretation of life. The aim of the Art Theatre, therefore, has been to reproduce the mood of a given play more thoroughly, more accurately than ever before.

Tchehoff's dramas gave Stanislavsky a stimulating opportunity to embody this theory of the theatre. The motives of Tchehoff, although they have not been applied blindly to all other productions at the Art Theatre, give a clue to the aim of Stanislavsky in the theatre. Those motives of the playwright, as stated by Nyemirovitch-Dantchenko, were:

" To free the stage from routine and literary stereotypes.

" To give back to the stage a living psychology and simple speech.

" To examine life not only through rising heights and falling abysses, but through the every-day life surrounding us.

" To seek ' theatricality ' of dramatic productions not in exceptional staging, which has given over the theatre for many years to a special kind of masters and has turned away from it the contemporary literary talents, but in the hidden inner psychologic life.

" The art of Tchehoff is the art of artistic freedom and artistic truth."

The counter-revolution against the revolt of Stanislavsky has had a number of varying aims, but it has taken two main forms. One of these lines of cleavage

has been within the theory of realistic or naturalistic representation as a medium of artistic expression, a disagreement with Stanislavsky's method of instruction of the actor. The other has been directed against the entire doctrine of illusory representation, an attempt to return to the theatre theatrical as it flourished in the time of Molière and the Italian *commedia dell' arte.*

Stanislavsky's method of instruction in acting is patent in his address to the company on taking up the study of " The Blue Bird ", a portion of which I have quoted in Chapter III. Reference to that preliminary lesson will reveal a belief in the actor's enrichment of his interpretative powers by observing the experiences of others, both men and beasts, and by attempting to put himself in their places. This, of course, is a decided step in advance of the old imitation of the external aspects of emotional experience, but it has not been wholly satisfactory to all of the theorists and the *régisseurs* of the Russian stage. No one has stated the case of the opposition more emphatically and at the same time with deeper appreciation of the achievement of Stanislavsky and the Art Theatre, than Fyodor Kommissarzhevsky in his book, " The Art of the Actor and the Theory of Stanislavsky."

" Neither the methods of external naturalistic acting," writes Kommissarzhevsky, " nor those of psychological naturalistic acting create stage values. The first theory, external naturalism, leads the actor toward more or less artful imitation of the external expression of human emotions and passions, toward imitation of

the results of soul experience, felt by other men but not by the actor. The creative actor, however, uses these experiences as raw material for his fantasy; his creations give him more delight than the reproduction of observations or experiences.

" The theory of the so-called psychological naturalistic acting turns genuine living experience into reasoned simulation; it teaches how intelligently to express psychological moods discovered through reasoned analysis; it teaches how to bind together cleverly the logical stream of experiences; and instead of the actor's characterization arising from his penetration of the writer's text, the worldly colorless anti-artistic experiences of the actor himself, as a man of the world, obtrude, mutilating the author.

" This psychological naturalistic theory is based on a half understanding of naturalistic scientific psychology; it denies the subconscious activity of our psychic nature, and denies the possibility of conscious as well as subconscious creation; it does not place the art of the actor on the ground of psychological realism.

" While stage exercises which favor the development of fantasy and the imagination of the actor enrich his consciousness, those exercises which consist in recollecting the worldly experiences of the actor limit the activity of his consciousness.

" Neither the first nor the second theory, if their rules of acting are put into practice, can kill the capability for creation in the actor who has been a creator before and who is able to think. Such an actor may

draw from both theories useful data for his creation, if no violence is done to him by his teacher. But if these rules of acting are forced upon an unthinking actor, then the result is a distorted actor.

"If Stanislavsky's principles are not used with too much confidence, but are carefully examined; if the genuinely psychological is separated from the contrived — that which is really felt from that which is acquired by reasoning — then the system is no doubt of great value to the actor, because no matter what blunders Stanislavsky made in his theory, with that theory he laid the foundation for the construction of the future theory of psychologically sincere dramatic art and erected a few guide posts on the psychological road which the actor must follow if he does not wish to be a grinning figurant.

"The system of Stanislavsky first of all calls the attention of the actor to his own psychological nature. He was the first to found a theory of acting based on psychological facts; he was the first to point to the methods by which the actor is to attain sincere living experiences. These methods are not true; they are based on erroneous psychological conclusions, and lead, as I have said, toward one's imitation of life and thence to imitation on the stage.

"This method of creating the inner psychological ensemble, based upon *inner* communion, was the greatest discovery of Stanislavsky; and it is on the stage of the Moscow Art Theatre that it was first put in practice, although when Stanislavsky theorizes he falls into

error. Still, at the Moscow Art Theatre these inner ensembles were created, because its actors were knit together on the stage by the creative genius of Stanislavsky, because his sharp instinctive understanding of his actor's soul whispered to him the means of binding the actors internally, and of making them feel one another, and not only hear one another. This was possible on the stage of the Moscow Art Theatre thanks solely to the talent of Stanislavsky and Nyemirovitch-Dantchenko. Such unification was possible because the actors were not picked up from all comers in Russia. Instead, they were all brought up and trained for that stage; they knew that they had to sacrifice their personal ambitions for the ensemble. Esthetics, culture, humanity, guided the leaders, who were tired of stereotyped art and favored the creative powers of the actors. At the same time, when applying their ' system ', the leaders crushed these powers.

" It has always seemed to me that reason was struggling with inspiration on the stage of the Art Theatre."

No one on the Russian stage is more conscious of his own limitations than Kommissarzhevsky. He knows that he is not blessed with the supreme vision and imaginative power of Stanislavsky, before which he is humble. He knows that he lacks the magnetic power over the souls and the imaginations of others which distinguishes the first artist of the Art Theatre. And yet, intellectually, he has been able to point out the flaw in the method of Stanislavsky which must be apparent

whenever a lesser genius than Stanislavsky tries to apply it.

"My method, though imperfect," he says, "I consider psychologically natural, and as a *régisseur* I look for the roots of the actor's creative power in his soul, and I dream of seeing him an independent cultural creator, not an imitator or a psychological experimenter." Only time and the appearance of an artist of the theatre great enough to develop and apply the principles he has barely indicated will tell whether he has conceived a greater truth or whether he is urging the unattainable counsel of human perfection and whether, after all, the theory of Stanislavsky represents the limit to which realism in art can be carried.

The revolt against the entire position of realism and naturalism in the theatre has been more determined and more significant. Meyerhold led it, with the aims and the results set forth in Chapter XIII. By the imaginative power of those aims and by the vigor with which he has prosecuted them, he has restored the theatre theatrical in Petrograd to a more honored and commanding position than it holds in any other world capital. By his achievements, he has encouraged others in Russia to make bold and interesting experiments. His preëminence in the Russian theatre alongside Stanislavsky is admitted by Stanislavsky himself, for the broad-minded leader of the Art Theatre is an exception to the rule of partisanship in esthetics. Meyerhold's gifts and his training as theorist, as playwright, as actor, as director and as critic, stamp him one of the

very few living "artists *of* the theatre" as distinguished by Gordon Craig from the "artists *in* the theatre."

I doubt whether Tairoff and the Kamerny Theatre would have become a creative, self-conscious group without the stimulus and the example of Meyerhold. Tairoff first took an active interest in the theatre in 1912, and by that time Meyerhold had perfected and applied his theory of the theatre theatrical. The Kamerny was founded as a direct protest against both Stanislavsky and Meyerhold. The theatre of realism, in the opinion of Tairoff, neglected the symbolic gesture and rhythm of the complete theatre, while the theatre theatrical by its inherent and necessary neglect of the emotional intimacy of the Art Theatre shut itself off from an indispensable function of the perfect stage. From the foundation of the Kamerny, therefore, Tairoff has sought by experiment and with open mind to discover a new form of theatrical art, a new theory of the theatre, which will combine the essential aspects of both extremes. Each play he has produced has been interpreted in the light of its own peculiar qualities in the hope that a new theory of the art of the theatre may be evolved. Instead of letting a preconceived theory dominate the production, he has tried to fulfill as richly as possible, with all the means which the modern theatre offers, the keynote or mood of each successive addition to the repertory.

That motive was apparent in the Kamerny's first production, the revival of the Hindu drama, "Sakun-

tala", of which Sergei Ignatoff wrote in the January, 1905, issue of Meyerhold's occasional pamphlet, The Journal of Doctor Dapertutto:

"There was an evident aim to lead the production to one general plan, namely to the old Hindu manuscript miniature. The primitiveness of the decorative means bordering on modern conventionalization was brought out from the beginning to the end of the play. Little trees invariably flat, the same flat horses, barely held together by the driver of Dushianti, a bower consisting only of two low benches — all these called inevitably to memory the composition and planning of miniatures which was strengthened by the pauses and gestures of the actors, characteristic of these miniatures."

That motive is equally evident in the recent cubist production of "Salome", where an intricate and esoteric symbolism of form is combined with a personal and psychological intimacy, to the end that the tragedy's throbbing passion is multiplied ten-fold. By a rigorously controlled sophistication, the Kamerny is striving for a richer simplicity and for a more decisive, more clarified dramatic effect in the theatre. As long as it is limited to plays written under the stimulus of other theories of the theatre or under no theory in particular, the Kamerny can not hope fully to attain its goal. As the Art Theatre awaited its Tchehoff and the Abbey Theatre of Dublin its Synge to become thoroughly conscious of motives and methods, so must the Kamerny wait for a playwright whose creative power

will serve as challenge and stimulus to its still vague ideals.

Outside the channel of controversy and discussion in Russia to-day stand the Small State Theatre of Moscow and the Ballet. Trained in the old school of unmilitant realism, Youzhin guards the classics with the artist's instinctive comprehension of their significance and of the means to make them eloquent. He and his stage are the inheritors of the humanized classicism of Motchaloff and Shchepkin, a classicism which, Alexander Ivanovitch admits, received a fresh stimulus from the thorough and painstaking methods introduced on the Russian stage by Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre.

The controversy which has centered around the Ballet in western Europe and in America during the last decade has had only feeble echoes in Moscow and Petrograd. Revolt in the Ballet is more costly and more forbidding than in the theatre, and the imperial conservatism has had its way, driving beyond the frontier Sergei Diagileff and his fellow rebels of the dance. Rumors of their exploits in exile, however, have drifted back home; and neither Moscow nor Petrograd forgets the shining inspiration of Isadora Duncan during her brief sojourn in Russia years ago. The soil, therefore, is prepared for the introduction in a free and orderly Russia of the intensely dramatic, atmospheric and symbolic work of Diagileff, Bakst and Stravinsky.

Standing almost alone in the Russian theatre, inheritor of none and enemy to few, is Nikolai Nikolaie-

vitch Yevreynoff and his arch-revolutionary theory of monodrama. That theory, it must be apparent from a study of its proponent's exegesis quoted in the preceding chapter, is not a theory for the interpretation of existing drama but rather a new way of thinking the theatre. Yevreynoff has his likes and dislikes in the field of the contemporary theatre; the Moscow Art Theatre, he contends, is the negation of the theatre, "a commercial house of artistic industry", and the Studios impress him as a kind of "Boys Wanted" sign hung out at the door. His tastes, however, are extremely catholic and tolerant of other ways of conceiving the theatre than his own.

The vivid language by which Yevreynoff expresses his revolt is typical of the revolutionist in any field. "Talent is a blood horse at the races," writes Kamyensky, Yevreynoff's biographer. "Genius is a horse of the steppes. Yevreynoff is a blood race horse of the steppes, unexpectedly tangoing with cows."

And so it is not surprising to find Yevreynoff himself writing: "My inmost dream is to cover life in holiday clothes, to become the tailor of her majesty, Life. This is a more enviable career than any I know."

Or again, in "The Theatre for One's Self": "Burn, theatre, burn to ashes. I kiss your very ashes, because from them, phoenix-like, you are reborn every time more and more beautiful. I bless the kindler of those fires and all his kind who assist in the transformation of the very well of transformations.

"I have no fears for the well. At the bottom of it

is an exhaustless and undrying source. Its life fluid comes from the blood of our veins. And this life fluid contends with fire. It delights in showing its power from time to time. From time to time it is pleased to weld itself together with the very fire of thought in order that together they may soar from a boiling fountain in a rainbow comprising all the imaginary colors, in the hot spray of which is the cure for all dreamers who have become cold."

Still further, he writes: "When I utter the word theatre, the first idea that comes to my mind is a child or a savage and all that is peculiarly creative in their transforming will: they are not grasping this world, which is not their world and is unintelligible to them, but they are replacing it with a freely invented world, freely accepted by them, depending not so much on destiny as on invention, — the attraction toward a mask as to a covering of their real 'I's.'

"When I say theatre, I think of transformation as the basis of life.

"When I say theatre, I believe that the divinity itself was of yore if not invented, worshipped at first in the capacity of the transformer.

"When I say theatre, I see men following the example of the divinity in spite of themselves, even in the case when man and everything human would seem powerless to do so.

"When I say theatre, I hear a child talking to inanimate objects; the ringing rustling of the masquerade ornaments of the savage; the stamping of the feet of

his painted female companion playing the gazelle pursued by the hunter.

" When I say theatre, I see an endlessly complicated ceremonial of national life, worked out by centuries."

To Yevreynoff, the will to the theatre is as natural and omnipresent a human instinct as the will to live and the will to power. " The fact that the child plays without being forced to," he says, " plays always, plays of his own volition, and that no one has to teach the child to play, to create his own theatre, proves that nature put in men some will to the theatre." In this light, Yevreynoff believes that much of the impulse back of revolution may be explained by the desire to get out of the norms of life — the will to play. Crime, too, he sees partially explained in the same way, and he finds therein a cue to Dostoievsky's " Crime and Punishment." " The daring Raskolnikoff," he writes, " rises a hundred heads above Napoleon. Napoleon needed the audience of the world; Raskolnikoff was sufficient unto himself."

The view that every human being is an actor in a great part of his daily life is not new. Richard Mansfield developed it interestingly in a magazine article not long before his death, and it crops out again and again in the psychology of William James. Yevreynoff, with typically Russian relentlessness and honesty, has simply followed this theory to its final analysis, and he seeks to reconstitute the theatre on the basis of a frank recognition of its universal significance. Independently of him, but with a similar impulse and motive,

Theodore Dreiser has sought a like goal in America in his volume, " Plays of the Natural and the Supernatural." Whether or not the democratic audience which is a necessary element of the theatre in any country is yet able to adjust itself readily to this revolutionary manner of conceiving the theatre, the theory of monodrama is the most intriguing accretion to the realm of esthetics in many years, the most pregnant gift of Russian genius to the theatre of our time.

The most fundamental, the most universal theory of the theatre in Russia, however, is that the theatre is an art and that every one connected with it must be an artist. By the unquestioning acceptance of that theory on the part of all its directors, its actors, its playwrights and its painters, the Russian theatre has attained the leadership of the world. Despite wide divergence of opinion as to the most truthful and the most expressive media, there is general acceptance of the fact that art is that to which artists turn their hands and that they are artists who see life more eloquently than their fellows. Without artists, no theory of the theatre is worth the paper on which it is written; with artists, the theory is merely the aftermath analysis of the manner in which the artists have expressed their vision.

CHAPTER XVI

The Path of Storm

As I examine the records of the four years that have elapsed since I gathered the data for the preceding chapters in person, in Moscow and Petrograd, I am struck by the evidence of the completion of an era in the Russian Theatre and the beginning of a new one. Convinced of that fact, I am persuaded to bring this chronicle down to date, both in a narrative and an interpretive sense.

The era that has passed and passed forever has a dual aspect. It can be viewed broadly or narrowly, but the terminus is the same in either case. From the immediate aspect, an end has come to the governmental control under the Soviet. Intimations of this interference were obvious, as we have seen, in the early days of the Bolshevik régime, but official supervision grew to all-inclusive proportions before it suddenly collapsed and disappeared. Coincidental in time and closely related in cause, came the conclusion to the century-old isolation of the Russian Theatre. Henceforth the theatres of Moscow and Petrograd belong to the world, just as, I am sure, the theatres of the world will belong to the theatres of the two Muscovite capitals, old and new.

Before examining the reasons for these epoch-making changes, their significance and implications for the theatres inside Russia and out, a subject which is reserved for the succeeding chapter, let us survey the path of storm of the last four years, observe what has happened to the established playhouses of Moscow and Petrograd and to the personalities connected with them, and appraise the foremost recruits to the institutional and personal roster.

For a year after my return, not the slightest hint came out of Russia concerning the theatre. The esthetic blockade was even tighter than in the early days of the Revolution while I was searching for evidence that my proposed quest would have tangible reward. A period of rumor ensued — wild, extravagant and sometimes even malicious rumor, concerning artists like Shaliapin and Stanislavsky, involving insanity, imprisonment and death by disease, starvation, suicide, murder and execution. Denial only fanned the flames of credulity. With the passing of peace-madness, came more dependable, but still fragmentary, information. Only when the mails were restored in the fall of 1921, on the entrance of the American Relief Administration into Russia, was it possible to obtain connected accounts of what had occurred behind the international veil. And finally these reports, incomplete through faulty conception of what the outside world wished to know, have been augmented and filled in by cross-questioning the steadily-increasing stream of Russian visitors to our shores.

It is only fair to state that my most dependable informant by correspondence has been Nikolai Yarovoff, artist and critic, who served as my interpreter in Moscow on more than one occasion, and that for my most valuable word-of-mouth reports I am indebted to Alexei Arhangelsky, composer of Balieff's *Letutchaya Muish,* who remained in Moscow in charge of that cellar of antic delight until he rejoined Balieff's staff in New York in July, 1922.

Without reference to individual stages and disregarding exceptional circumstances, the general trend of these four years, as I have said, has carried the Russian Theatre from desultory official heckling and interference through increasing and ultimately complete state control and operation, and finally in full circle back to the old time independence. The earlier part of this cycle, of course, grew out of the Soviet determination to bend every social agency, including the theatre, to the service of spreading Communist propaganda. The latter arc of the cycle is just as surely the result of the complete failure of the attempt to make the theatre subservient to anything but esthetic laws.

Keeping this general pattern in mind and withholding specific references and deductions as to its consequences until the next chapter, I shall proceed to relate the recent fortunes of playhouses involved in my original narrative, as well as of those which have sprung up since my sojourn in Russia.

With an irony often characteristic of some of the most laudable attempts at novelty, the Kamerny and the

other theatres of artistic revolt have to yield first position to the Moscow Art Theatre and its subsidiary Studios for a chronicle of activities absorbing in its human interest and dramatic significance. In a time of upheaval, it might be supposed that the new would outdistance the old in these respects, but when the old is as firmly rooted in public affection as the Moscow Art Theatre is, when it is as definitely conscious of its own purposes and methods and as unmistakably responsible for most of the new theatre inside Russia, as well as much outside its borders, then the old need fear no inroads on its position and security.

The recent record of the Moscow Art Theatre is a curious patchwork of romance, adventure and makeshift, of dogged courage in holding to ideals, of shrewd trimming on occasion to relentless winds, of almost superhuman vitality in planting and cultivating new enterprises. A small group of the company was caught on tour in Harkoff at the close of the spring season in 1919 by the north-sweeping armies of Denikin, and it faced the problem of returning through the lines to Moscow or remaining in anti-Soviet territory. Councils were divided. Podgorny felt that he had given his word to return, and after days of exposure between the lines, he made his way back to the capital. The remainder, including Mmes. Knipper and Germanova, and Katchaloff, Massalitinoff, Bersenieff, Alexandroff and Pavloff, seized what they felt was the advantage of accidental exile and worked their way southward with Denikin in retreat.

On the collapse of the White armies and the extension of Red territory to the Black Sea, this exile band took ship to Constantinople, found refuge for a season of Tchehoff's and other plays of the established repertory in Sofia, Bulgaria, and ultimately reached Berlin. There and in Prague, Vienna and Scandinavia they eked out a living from month to month and won approval from enthusiastic audiences who had never seen the entire company at work. Fortunately for both groups, their forces were so divided that most of their favorite plays could be presented adequately. With the prospect of an American tour looming ahead, however, the exiles rejoined their comrades in Moscow late in the spring of 1922 to reunite and consolidate scattered elements, and to prepare once more a single impregnable front by public presentation in full force, for the first time in three years, of Tchehoff's "The Three Sisters" and "The Cherry Orchard" and Gorky's "The Lower Depths."

The larger group, which remained in Moscow in 1919, faced ever-increasing difficulties. Official opposition to the repertory on account of its supposedly bourgeois tendencies meant that a constant threat to close the theatre hung over its head. The twentieth anniversary had passed the year before without the promised revival of Tchehoff's "The Sea Gull." Blok's "The Rose and the Cross" was still held up in rehearsal.

Three new productions, however, were made during

these difficult years, together with an important revival and the continuation of several of the faithful Lares and Penates of the repertory, such as Gorky's "The Lower Depths," Turgenieff's "A Month in the Country," Ostrovsky's "Enough Stupidity in Every Wise Man" and Hamsun's "In the Claws of Life." The revival was that of Gogol's "*Revizor*" or "The Inspector General," which with the bluff and burly Uraloff in the rôle of the credulous and viable mayor, first entered the Art Theatre's repertory in the season of 1908–1909. The staunch and reliable Moskvin now wore Uraloff's shoes, with Korenieva as the mayor's daughter and the brilliant Tchehoff, nephew of the playwright, as the bumptious pretender, Hlestyakoff. In the keeping of such as these, the revival of "*Revizor*" sustained the Art Theatre's standards undimmed.

The three new productions fared not so well — or rather, one of them fared ill, while the Art Theatre itself was the sufferer by the success of the other two. The honorable failure was Byron's "Cain," which was taken to the storehouse after about ten performances. The veteran, Leonidoff, had the title part, while Eve was played by Korenieva, Abel by Gaidaroff and Adam by Znamensky, who later was the victim of a tragic accidental death. The dubious successes were two light operas, Le Cocq's "*La Fille de Mme. Angot*" and Millöcker's "The Singing Birds," the first retrogression of the Art Theatre's stage to frivolous ends.

Public taste seemed to demand such as these in order to permit an occasional performance of Gorky or Gogol, of Ostrovsky or Turgenieff.

Public taste, on the other hand, has rallied just as decisively to the courageous efforts of the unyielding spirits in the company to keep the fire of old ideals and of new enterprise burning in the Studio Theatres. Not only have the First and the Second Studios weathered the difficult days; but a Third, a Fourth and an Operatic Studio have been added. I know of no surer proof — if proof be needed — that the theatre in Russia will survive whatever the future has in store, no more convincing indication that the influence of the Moscow Art Theatre will be felt long after those who founded it have passed away.

Taking the Studio Theatres in order, though not in the rank of their intrinsic values as determined by their recent activities, the First Studio has removed from its match-box auditorium and stage in Skobelieff Square to ample quarters in a remodeled restaurant building in the Triumphalnaya Ploshchad, far out on the Tverskaya. The original stage is still used for rehearsal. To its old repertory, reviewed in Chapter VI, it has recently added "Michael, the Achangel" by a Russian dramatist, Mme. Nadiezhda Bromley, and Strindberg's "Eric XIV." Something of the old eagerness seems to have departed from the First Studio, due in part to the graduation of such leading figures as Mlle. Baklanova, the young Tchehoff and others to the parent stage, the assignment of still others as preceptors for

the newer Studios and the departure of Kolin for devious adventures abroad.

The Second Studio, too, has a new home, having outgrown its cramped quarters across the city near the Telephone Building. It is now amply housed in the Tverskaya in the rooms of the old Railway Club. Yevgeny Kaluzhsky, son of the great character actor of the parent stage, Vassily Luzhsky, is still associated with the Second Studio and is its chief mentor since the suicide of Alexei Stahovitch in 1919. Mlle. Tarasova is still its outstanding acting talent. Only a single production has been added to its repertory, "The Tale of Ivanushka the Stupid," dramatized by Tchehoff from an anonymous folk tale related remotely to "*Konyok-Gorbunok.*"

If the First and Second Studios have more or less marked time, the Third has made up for them by an amazing first season, a season dominated by youth, eagerness, virility, tirelessness, the fire of fresh imagination. With funds and authority provided by the Government, the commodious home of Prince Gagarin, half way down the Arbat, was obtained in the fall of 1921 as a location for the new Studio Theatre, with an auditorium seating 250 to 300. The ambitious young people enrolled in its ranks were placed in charge of Yevgeny Vakhtangoff, of the First Studio, who used to play the rôle of Tackleton in "The Cricket on the Hearth." Three productions in its first year is a record none of the other Studios has ever attained in a single season: Maeterlinck's "The Miracle of St.

Anthony" and a bill of three short plays by Tchehoff in the fall of 1921, and "Turandot" in late winter with costumes and scenes designed by the eminent artist, Sergei Yakuloff. A shadow was cast over this most promising venture toward the close of the spring season, when its guiding spirit, Vakhtangoff, fell ill from overwork and died.

The Fourth Studio, too, was a product of the access of activity of the autumn of 1921. With its quarters, like those of the First Studio, on the Triumphalnaya Ploshchad, it has an auditorium seating about 600. The first year was devoted to rehearsals; and the opening production, "Our Family," by Griboyedoff, Shakovskoy and Hmelnitsky, was made during the summer of 1922. The present season has begun with "The Inhabited Earth," with scenery by Gortinskaya. This Studio has recently invited Meyerhold to stage a series of Strindberg's plays for it, an ironic turn in the wheel of fate, for it was by way of an early Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre in 1905, that this rebel from the tenets of Stanislavsky made his way by degrees out of the fold.

Although all of the Studio Theatres have been the particular concern and pride of Stanislavsky, it is the Opera Studio, founded along with the Third and Fourth in the fall of 1921, which commands his immediate attention and attachment. As evidence of this interest, the Opera Studio is housed in his home, or, to put it more literally, the Government has allocated to the good grey god-father of the modern Russian

theatre several rooms in the building which has been assigned to the Studio, on condition that his library be made available to the students. This Opera Studio, apparently, fulfils one of the functions performed by the Second Studio while I was in Moscow: the elementary training of the very youngest students. That explains in part the transfer of Stanislavsky's affections. The Second Studio by this time is grown up. The Opera Studio is Youth knocking at the gate. And the co-founder of the Art Theatre feels that his creative influence is most potent today as stimulus to the imagination of the on-coming generation. Thus far the only public performances of this group have been given on special occasions on the stage of the Art Theatre itself — medley programs of unrelated scenes from "Werther," "*Yevgeny Onyegin*" and particularly dramatizations of single songs.

These are the regularly established appendages of the Moscow Art Theatre. But there are others on the outskirts, connected with the Art Theatre only through the personal relationship of Stanislavsky, Leonidoff and others of the Art Theatre. In this category, there is already an Armenian Studio and a Jewish Studio, with other racial groups to be similarly represented when plans are carried out.

If the Kamerny Theatre can show no such record of struggle, adventure and expansion as this, its achievement at least outruns that of every other stage introduced in the preceding chapters. Suspected like the rest in the beginning as haunt of bourgeois and

dilletante, it gradually won official immunity, confidence, favor and support through the shrewd policy of its *régisseur,* Alexander Tairoff. In sheer producing activity, as well as in the provocative quality of its new work, the Kamerny surpasses even the Art Theatre, if the latter's Studios are not taken into account. Five new productions of the first order, each of them accounted a financial success and a step in advance artistically; removal to larger quarters and increase of its staff to upward of a hundred; and the continuation in the repertory of all the most marked achievements of former seasons — this, in sum, is the four-year chronicle of Moscow's dramatic revolutionists.

Tsar and star of the Kamerny are still Tairoff and Alice Koonen. In addition to making all of the new productions, Tairoff has found time to complete and publish in 1921 his long-awaited confession of dramatic faith, " Notes of a *Régisseur.*" Mme. Koonen, of course, has played the leading rôle in each of the new pieces, and with her *" Phèdre,"* particularly, in the spring of 1922, she seems to have fully justified the faith in her future which her impassioned " Salome " aroused. Tseretelli is still the leading man of the Kamerny; but the fourth member of the directorate, Henri Forterre, after remaining in Moscow until 1920, returned to his native Paris, joined Balieff there and remained in the French capital when the proprietor of " The Bat " proceeded on his way to London and New York.

Scribe's " Adrienne Lecouvreur " was the first ad-

Saharoff, Moscow

"ROMEO AND JULIET" IN CUBIST GUISE AT THE KAMERNY THEATRE, MOSCOW, WITH SETTING AND COSTUMES DESIGNED BY ALEXANDRA EXTER IN STYLE SIMILAR TO HER "SALOME"

Saharoff, Moscow

RACINE'S "PHEDRE" ON THE STAGE OF THE KAMERNY THEATRE, MOSCOW, WITH ALICE GIORGIEVNA KOONEN AS PHEDRE AND WITH MONUMENTAL SETTINGS AND COSTUMES DESIGNED BY VIESNIN

dition to the Kamerny's repertory as heretofore outlined. Boris Ferdinandoff, the young designer of "King Harlequin," executed the settings and costumes in a spirit of cubist rococo and thereby set the mood for a thoroughly modern and deliberately and consciously theatrical interpretation of this gorgeous old relic of artificiality.

"Princess Brambilla" followed, a fantasy by Hoffman, with scenery and costumes by Yakuloff and music by Forterre. The Kamerny next returned to Claudel for *"L'Annonce Faite à Marie"* or "The Tidings Brought to Mary." Forterre wrote special music for it and the celebrated painter, Viesnin, designed austerely simple settings and costumes. Another fling at Shakespeare ensued with "Romeo and Juliet," interpreted in the same violently modern manner as "The Merry Wives of Windsor" back in 1916. The Kamerny had learned to bring actors and setting in closer accord in the interval, and the production, with music by Alexandroff, and designs from the brush of Alexandra Exter of "Salome" fame, provided a triumph for Mme. Koonen as Juliet.

Finally, in the spring of 1922, came Racine's *"Phèdre,"* acknowledged to be the peak of the Kamerny's accomplishment alongside the early pantomime, "The Veil of Pierrette," and the cubist "Salome." Dissatisfied with the existing literal translation as hopelessly incompatible with modern tastes, Tairoff entrusted the making of a new version in the form of a free adaptation to the eminent poet, Valery Briussoff.

The translator performed his difficult task brilliantly, preserved Racine's ideas from mutilation and fixed them like a cherished jewel in a fresh setting. The stage decorations, by Viesnin, were monumental and impressive in their classic harmony, and the costumes had the genuine simplicity of line and color of the Hellenic primitives. The deep dark blue of the sky in the first act, ominous of impending tragedy, struck the emotional tonal key to the whole production.

Side by side with these new plays, old favorites were repeated: the pantomime, "The Veil of Pierrette"; Debussy's "The Box of Toys"; Wilde's "Salome"; and "King Harlequin." An operetta and a new pantomime comprise the new work on which Tairoff is engaged.

Dismissed as a mere curiosity by Moscow critics even as late as "Salome," the Kamerny has at last won critical and public acknowledgment. Tairoff's esthetic theories, while utterly divorced from political intent, are easily compatible with a fluid and restless state of the public mind. This belated acceptance, together with the aid of the Government, enabled the Kamerny to move from its make-shift club-house to a larger theatre in the Arbatskaya Ploshchad in 1918. In the end it returned to its spacious original home in the Tverskoi Boulevard, from which the necessity to subsist on a meagre budget had forced it by the time I was in Moscow. Tairoff is still eager to come to America, but his theatre would lack the novelty it would have had four years ago. Our own

theatre in the meanwhile has moved forward perceptibly along lines similar to those of the Kamerny, under the independent inspiration of Robert Edmond Jones as designer, and Eugene O'Neill as playwright.

The remaining theatres and personalities of contemporary Moscow and Petrograd can be easily grouped in three classes: those concerned in my earlier chapters, which have either marked time, deteriorated or disappeared; new enterprises; and self-imposed exiles.

The struggle of the Ballet for mere existence has been carried on against pathetically discouraging odds. Protected and supported as a show place for All-Russian and International Congresses, but not with sufficient funds to make possible new productions, the Great State Theatre in Moscow faced a complete shut-down in the winter of 1921–22 after the playhouses had been thrown once more on their own resources. The Ballet had always required subsidies, even under the Tsar, and in the view of A. V. Lunatcharsky, Kommissar of Education in charge of all the theatres, the two billion rubles allotted monthly by the Soviet to its upkeep could be better spent in increasing the miserly salary of school teachers.

Accordingly, the commission in charge of the curtailment of unimportant governmental establishments and personnel decided to lock and bar the doors of the home of the Ballet. At once, a formidable protest arose — not from the ignorant and disgustingly ill-mannered profiteers who purchase the best seats today, nor from the remains of the *intelligentsia* who devoted

their indignation to futile speculative analysis of the situation. The protest came from the silent workmen of Moscow, who, with dirty hands and faces and clad in rags, took up the question at their factory meetings and demanded that the Soviet reopen the theatre at once. The army barracks repeated this demand. And the result was that the commission revoked its decision and appointed a subcommission to investigate means of curtailing unnecessary expenses.

Zhukoff and Mme. Geltser are still the premier dancers in Moscow, although not long ago Mordkin suddenly turned up from a four-year exile in the Caucasus, assumed momentary control, clashed with his superiors and returned to Tiflis. Mlle. Abramova is the hope of the younger generation, one of those startling discoveries from the ballet school who periodically renew the grip which this form of art holds over public attention. The Ballet at the Marinsky in Petrograd has dropped beneath notice, just as have all the playhouses of the old capital, including even the Alexandrinsky, since the Soviet removed the crown of art and letters as well as of politics to the Kremlin City.

Uninspired, except by emulation of the Moscow Art Theatre and by the single important individual talent of Prince Sumbatoff (Youzhin), the Small State Theatre of Moscow has failed to distinguish itself notably in the last four years. It has lost by death both Ossip Pravdin and Mme. Sadovskaya, indispensable veterans, and by secession, the youthful talents of Maximoff and

Mlle. Gzovskaya. Yermolova, now undisputed *grande dame* of the Russian stage, in the celebration of whose fiftieth anniversary as a player the Soviet joined in 1921, weathered a serious illness and acts once more, though infrequently.

Besides keeping the plays of Ostrovsky in the repertory, Youzhin has made an ambitious but conventional production of Shakespeare's "Richard III," in which he enacts the king, and an elaborate revival of Schiller's "Mary Stuart." The latter, disclosed in the spring of 1922, had all the faults and few of the virtues of this home of the classic drama, for its treatment was minutely exact rather than vitally dramatic. Korovin, still associated with the State Theatres in Moscow, designed new scenery. Recreating the life of Tudor times with meticulous accuracy, the settings and costumes and ceremonials must have been interesting to historical students, although only the episode of the execution was deeply moving to the ordinary spectator.

Little can be said for the established theatres of the second line in Moscow except that they have persisted. The Moscow Dramatic Theatre attracted some attention with Shaw's "Great Catherine," which would seem like carrying coals to Newcastle, although a close parallel with our importation of an Englishman's biographical drama about our own Lincoln. The Theatre Korsha tried to keep abreast of the times by producing Rolland's "Danton" and Shelley's "The

Cenci," while the Zon Theatre revived "Wilhelm Tell" and the Theatre Nezlobina continued its old repertory for a time.

Petrograd, as I have indicated, has suffered the most serious deterioration. The record is almost wholly one of disaster. Vsevolod Meyerhold and Nikolai Yevreynoff, outstanding talents of the theatre in the northern capital, gave up their anchorage there long ago — the latter before I arrived in Russia and the former shortly after I left. Since then, they have been wanderers, like the late Pavel Orlienieff. Yevreynoff still tours the provinces, presenting a new play of his own, "The Chief." Meyerhold, more brilliant and volatile, less determined and less sure of himself than either the Moscow Art Theatre or the Kamerny, has played hide and seek with the Soviet. Stanislavsky ignored it, or defied it. Tairoff frankly courted it, though denying a place on his stage for its propaganda. After various experiences with the Reds in the north, with the Whites in the Crimea, recantation and return to Petrograd, Meyerhold has recently accepted from the Soviet the direction of the dispossessed and desperate company of the old Theatre Nezlobina in Moscow, now housed in the Zon Thetre. With no playwright, since the death of Leonid Andreieff in 1919 and of Alexander Blok in 1921, to provide for him the kind of stylized and expressionistic material he needs, and with only a handful of young, inexperienced players left, after he had discharged the stiff and hide-bound elder members of the

Nezlobin company, he has not yet accomplished anything of moment in his new field.

The flood of new theatres and of individual productions made in connection with the Soviet's avowed purpose to make the playhouse an additional engine of Communist propaganda began to appear back in 1919, as soon as the Government had time to devote to the subject. Most of these misguided experiments in the regimentation of art have failed. Some of them endured only a few weeks. To such as these, however, the roster of new enterprises during the last four years chiefly belongs. The exceptional venture was the one which admitted allegiance only to the art of the theatre, and most of these have persisted and prospered.

The illiterate and upstart nature of some of the Soviet's Quixotic undertakings is apparent from their "smart aleck" titles — *Terevsat,* or Theatre of Revolutionary Satire, in which an attempt to combine dramatic and motion picture episodes was a dismal failure; and *Moscomdram,* the Moscow Theatre of the Communistic Drama, which closed almost as soon as it opened through lack of plays fulfilling its mongrel cognomen. A similar maneuver in the requisition of the Theatre of Operetta, formerly in the Nikitskaya and later in the Nikolskaya in the premises of the restaurant, Slavyansky Bazar, had greater success through limiting its propaganda to ridicule of the reactionary generals and armies in the manner of our own song and dance revues, with a suggestion by the

way concerning the advantages of comradeship and industry among Communists.

The most ambitious efforts to make to order a proletarian drama are associated with the names of two futurist poets, who were rising to dubious fame while I was in Moscow. The first of them, an " occasional " piece composed to celebrate the third anniversary of the Soviet in November, 1920, was the work of Vassily Kamyensky and bore the name of " Stenka Razin," a bandit leader of ancient times. Presented simultaneously in the open air in Petrograd and in the Great State Theatre in Moscow, it enlisted its spectators as participants, the bandit's gang, and the press naïvely or wittingly admitted that it was true to life!

The second of these huge pageant dramas of the revolution was " Mystery-Bouffée " by Kamyensky's friend, Vladimir Mayakovsky, produced under the direction of Meyerhold and Vladimir Bebutoff in the Zon Theatre in Moscow as a part of the May Day festivities in 1921. Starting with Noah and the Flood, this bombastic allegory surveys all civilization, celebrates the triumph of Communism and ends with a plea for self-effacing work and the electrified state. " Mystery-Bouffée " cost enormous sums to produce and ran for a hundred performances.

The theatre once more was drafted for the celebration of the fourth anniversary of the Soviet Revolution in November, 1921. This time the task of apostrophising Communism was entrusted to Isadora Duncan who, six months previously, had arrived in Moscow

and had accepted a studio and liberal credits from the Government. Returning to the stage in person after a long absence, she devised the allegory of the Russian workman struggling to free himself from his chains and the Tsar's heel as accompaniment to Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, a daring feat when it is recalled that the audience was asked to listen again and again to the old tabooed national anthem, and adjust it to the dancer's newer meaning. Even the Soviet press gave contradictory verdicts, but until her recent return to America, Miss Duncan remained in Moscow, housed in the magnificent residence of the ballerina, Balashova, which was confiscated on the latter's flight abroad without permission.

Of other new ventures in the last four years, outside the category of the proletarian, two may be mentioned before passing on to several which deserve fuller consideration: the Theatre of Comedy and Melodrama, founded by artists regularly connected elsewhere but unable to subsist on a single salary, where Wilde's "The Picture of Dorian Grey" was sadly misinterpreted; and the New State Theatre, housed in the old Theatre Nezlobina and just as completely out of touch with the times as the company which was dispossessed and nearly starved before being handed over to the exacting mercies of Meyerhold.

One of the noteworthy new enterprises, to which I have referred, is the First State Theatre for Children, naïve enough in its program and repertory, definitely constructive in its work and fulfilling a distinct need,

but founded — ironically enough — according to the authority of Zinaida Hippius, author of "The Green Ring" and wife of the novelist, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, with hush money provided by Lunatcharsky from the public treasury for Mme. Paskar, one of his mistresses.

The Children's Theatre opened in the summer of 1920 in a remodeled shed near the old English Club, and since then has built up the following repertory: "Mowgli," a heroic fairy tale made from Kipling's "Jungle Book"; "Nursery Rhymes," a dramatization from Musorgsky; "The Pasha and the Bear," a vaudeville from Scribe; "The Nightingale," a lyric fairy tale from the story of Andersen; "The Color Box," by one of the most gifted of contemporary Russian writers, Alexei Remizoff; and "Tom Sawyer," a dramatization from Mark Twain's famous story. T. S. Fedotoff, who has worked for the Kamerny Theatre, was the scenic artist and special music has been composed by Forterre, Vassilenko, and Gretchaninoff. The theatre gives performances about four times a week; its audiences are limited to children and their teachers or guardians; and its tickets are distributed to each school in the city about four or five times a year.

Perhaps the most startling development of the difficult years — startling to those who knew the anti-Semitic Moscow of Tsarist days — is the movement for a Jewish theatre, a movement which has resulted in two solely Jewish stages, both now in their fourth season.

On one of them, the Jewish Kamerny Theatre, the plays are given in Yiddish; on the other, the Studio Theatre Gabima, only the purest Hebrew is heard. The former is the more pretentious and has been the busier of the two; the latter has emerged from comparative obscurity at a single stroke by an amazingly perfect and moving production of St. An-sky's folk-tragedy, "The Dibbuk," already introduced to the New York stage by the Yiddish Art Theatre.

The Jewish Kamerny Theatre owes its existence to a group of artists of that race, including Granovsky, Rosovsky, Moosan, Achron and Altman, who determined in 1919 to found such a stage and six months later opened its doors in Petrograd, thanks to funds provided by the Petrograd Soviet. In its first season it produced Maeterlinck's "The Blind," "Uriel Acosta" by Karl Gutzkow, and Sholom Ash's "In the Winter." Deciding to move to Moscow in the summer of 1920, it encountered delays and did not reopen until January 1, 1921, in an auditorium on the second floor of a street branching off the Tverskaya. Its repertory since then has been a bill of three short plays by Sholom Ash, Veiter's "Before Dawn," and Ash's "The God of Revenge." The last named is its most satisfactory achievement.

Seating only eighty and drawing a cosmopolitan audience — due to the fear of wealthy Jews to be seen in so modest a place, and of the strictly orthodox to be seen in a playhouse at all — the Jewish Kamerny Theatre is still an experimental laboratory on its way

to becoming a full-fledged theatre. Its director, A. M. Granovsky, was trained under Reinhardt in Berlin. Its scenic and mural artists, Marc Shagal and J. Rabinovitch, are known internationally among modernist painters. Its company numbers thirty-five, its staff ninety-eight — more than one to each seat in the house! No one has received a salary in over a year, but the Soviet gives them small rations cooked in the building and rooms to live in, so why worry about salary?

The Gabima, accounted by many as Moscow's most interesting theatre, has had an even more prohibitively difficult struggle than its Yiddish rival. Until its production of "The Dibbuk," it had been known only for a few short plays and "The Wandering Jew," which gave observers, however, a foretaste of the insight and imagination displayed in staging An-sky's strange legend. Yevgeny Vakhtangoff, director of the Third Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre, produced "The Dibbuk" for the Gabima in a spirit of consciously exaggerated ecstasy. His death will be felt keenly here as well as on his own stage.

The exiles remain to be considered. The Ballet has lost heavily: Karsavina to private life; Novikoff and Mlles. Anderson and Balashova to Western Europe; Fokine and Fokina and Mlle. Krieger to America. Shaliapin, the uncrowned Tsar of both stage and song, has returned to us. Fyodor Kommissarzhevsky closed his tiny playhouse in Moscow in 1919, went to London, made many free lance productions there and has joined us, too, as stage director for the Theatre

Guild. And of course there is Nikita Balieff, of *Letutchaya Muish,* The Bat, the *Chauve-Souris.* And the Moscow Art Theatre impending. Really these Russians who have brought themselves and their theatre to America will require a chapter all to themselves!

CHAPTER XVII

"Plus Ça Change"

Meanwhile, let us analyze briefly the path of storm of the four years we have just passed in review. What proof do they yield that two epochs have terminated — the period of national isolation and the period of rigid government control? What have been the dreams and ideals achieved and unrealized? What has this strict official supervision entailed on the part of audiences and artists? Why was it abandoned and what followed inevitably in its wake? What is its residue? What are its implications? What price has the Russian theatre paid for this stupendous experiment, this major operation on a living body without benefit of anesthetic?

It is obvious without discussion or proof that the age of ingrowing national self-sufficiency is over. Artists, individually and in groups, have swarmed abroad. Some of them have reached us; others are on their way. Still others are straining at the leash in Moscow and Petrograd, and their departure seems to be only a question of time and the receptive capacity of their foreign patrons. On their ultimate return from world wandering, they will carry back esthetic trophies of their tours — probably not new theories or

new technique, for they themselves have developed inquiry and experiment along these lines farther than any other contemporary stage; but at least new subject matter for their playwrights, new angles of characterization for their players, new world horizons. They, in turn, will have influenced the stages they have visited, a phase of the situation which, in its American aspect, will be considered in Chapter XVIII. Most important of all, the habit of isolation has been destroyed, and henceforth the road is open to exchange of new ideas between Russia and the rest of the world.

The return to private management and operation and the revival of the pre-war repertory with the collapse of Soviet superintendence, has not been so simple and placid a cycle. *" Plus ça change,"* despite its connotation of the wheel that has come full circle, implies, too, the anxiety, the uncertainty, the aggravation, the restless and disturbing adjustment of constantly shifting conditions. In this difficult and wearing process, the superficial is all too likely to appear to be the fundamental, the temporary to be the permanent.

The vitality that underlies the institution of the theatre in Russia, however, has been equal to all of these onslaughts. We have seen how that vitality withstood the moral, economic and material strictures of war and the earlier days of the Revolution. It has been stronger, though, than the most sanguine had hoped, and that strength has enabled it to weather

the ignorance, the meddling and fanaticism of those who have tried to draft it in enslaved service to their ulterior motives. After its time of trial and persecution, the theatre is dazed and reduced to humiliating expedients to carry on at all, but it is still the most normal and the most vital of all the social institutions of Russia, and its survival is replete with evidence proving the necessity of freedom in art.

It is illuminating, therefore, to read in a letter from my friend Yarovoff:

"Not so long ago we declared the theatre a mighty weapon for the enlightenment of the masses. We distributed tickets among workers' organizations for a nominal sum of 3,000 to 25,000 rubles each, or often free of charge. We exercised sharp control over the repertory and severely punished theatre directors for every play that did not agree with our revolutionary ideas. Many directors were completely ruined. Artists were mobilized and sent to play, without their consent, even to the provinces.

"Today — if you have the money and can pay the Soviets — you are permitted to have ten, a hundred, a thousand theatres if you like, and you may do with them whatever you wish. Revolutionary ideas? Propaganda? Communism? Forget it! Just make money and pay the taxes, the rent, etc.

"It is no wonder, then, that after four years of spiritual starvation, we have a consuming desire to refresh our emotions in a private theatre where no one will annoy us with propaganda or feed us plays

Photograph by A. Bobkoff, M.D., Moscow

PLUS CA CHANGE. THE TOVARISHCH OF THE RED ARMY DISPLACES THE BLACK HUSSAR IN THE BALLET DRESSING-ROOM

Photograph by A. Levitzky, Moscow

"THE NIGHTINGALE," A LYRIC FAIRY TALE FROM THE STORY BY HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN, AT THE FIRST STATE THEATRE FOR CHILDREN, MOSCOW, WITH SETTING DESIGNED BY T. S. FEDOTOFF

and music by dramatists and composers standing on a 'revolutionary platform.' For four years our daily reading has been limited exclusively to the official Communist newspapers, until we are all so well versed in Communist matters that every educated man, regardless of his political convictions, can easily write a *'Steklovitsa'* (current *mot* for editorial, from N. Stekloff, chief of the staff of *'Izvestia'*). We have absorbed so much Communism free of charge that we are unwilling to spend money to hear any more of it."

As usual, of course, there is another side to the passing of the cycle of government control of the theatres, and this emerges in another letter from the same source. Beneath the official regimentation of play, player and playhouse for propagandist purposes lay a Utopian design, an extravagant and impractical motive whose disappearance with the return of the money-grubber has left the scene somehow poorer.

"For years," writes Yarovoff, "our motto was 'Everything free of charge! Everything from the hands of the Government!' Now we have abruptly turned in the opposite direction: 'Everything for money!' Idealists and friends of art view the future with alarm. What new embarrassment will it have in store? During the last four years, apparently, the Government has been trying to profess a less material conception of art and the theatre. 'Art as a channel for the political education of the masses' could have nothing in common with art for mere amusement's

sake or as a source of commercial profit. The Soviet undertook a project, the like of which has never been known before in the history of civilization. It assumed the monopoly of art; it made a titanic effort to lift the various forms of art to unattainable heights; it confiscated and supported for ostensibly ideal motives all the theatres, picture galleries, palaces and museums.

"We the contemporaries of this historic project see only its sinister aspects. We are disappointed that nothing tangible has been accomplished. We are shocked to see our writers and artists in the grip of starvation, apparently as a result of this course. But when our days have passed into legendary history, perhaps mankind will yield recognition to the flaming faith and the noble if fanatical impulse of some of those who tried to mold them. Posterity may recall that in these years no theatre dared cater to the lower instincts of the masses. Even the theatres hostile to the Revolution paid to it the tribute of daring to produce nothing but the classical plays of the various literatures of the world.

"Contrast with this, the situation which confronts us now. 'Everything for money!' Money is not to be found where ideas reside. Thrown on their own resources, many of the theatres advertise a repertory of a frivolous and even a degraded quality. The latter seldom prospers, for the Moscow public resents mere morbid depravity. But the music hall programs, with their cheap Armenian and Jewish anecdotes,

attract a larger clientele than the better concerts and the serious plays at the established theatres."

It must be remembered, of course, that these established theatres, to which I have introduced you in the course of this book, do still exist, that they have kept their doors open on their traditional repertory under peace, war, revolution, government control and the return to private operation, and that they have always found and still find an audience interested in their activities. It is these theatres and their record which justify the concluding phrase of the proverb, whose opening words give title to this chapter.

In the theatre life of Moscow today, a strange new figure is discernible — the unlettered, unrefined peace-profiteer, or Nep-man, whose curious nickname is formed from the initials of the Soviet's sanction for private trading, or "New Economic Policy." Even in the serious theatres, he and his kept and bejewelled women appear as a minor stratum, but he is most at home in the music halls, at the opera or the ballet.

"A ticket for Isadora Duncan's dance-concert is dearer than one for a symphonic concert," writes Victor Yus in a recent number of *Ecran*, a newly established periodical of the theatre. "The Nep-men go, of course, to see Isadora Duncan dance. Higher prices mean to them a better show. Wherever tickets are expensive, 'all Moscow' may be seen — that is, today's Moscow, the Moscow of the Nep-men. Between the acts they buy and sell anything, everything at astronomical figures — whether they pos-

sess the goods or not. The actor, of course, does not know what to make of this new public. The Nepman belongs neither to the bourgeoisie, the democracy, the *intelligentsia* or the proletariat. He is simply a gambler from a bucket shop."

To realize that this gross and revolting type is not the only patron of the theatre in Moscow, it is necessary only to recall the protest of the workmen and soldiers of the capital when the Soviet threatened last winter to close the Great State Theatre, home of the opera and ballet. In the words of Yarovoff descriptive of that episode, "Of all the theatres, the Moscow proletarian prefers the opera. Perhaps its folk tales are more fascinating to him. Strange events, costumes and music take him far away from his everyday life and labor. In the dreamland of the lyric stage he can forget the hardships of today and the troubles of tomorrow. He loses himself in a romantic new world. It makes no difference that he seldom understands the sense and the implications of the story and the music. It is the strange emotional atmosphere with which opera surrounds him that he appreciates most."

In the presence of these sincere and naïve patrons, no matter whether they understand fully or not, and of the residue of the old-time audiences, the artists are inspired to continue their work — to continue in the face of administrative and economic and material handicaps, which would discourage and silence them and drive them to an alternate livelihood, if they were

not more whole-heartedly devoted to their profession than those with whom we are familiar.

The case of the Nezlobin company in Moscow is illustrative of the dogged determination of the Russian actor to cling to his profession. Just before Christmas, 1921, despite the fact that the theatres had been supposedly released from government control, the Theatre Nezlobina was confiscated and the company dispossessed and thrown into the street. Threatened from time to time, since 1919, on the score of its " reactionary " repertory, including such plays as Artsuibasheff's " Jealousy " and Rostand's " *L'Aiglon,*" the company had managed to ward off the final catastrophe and had preserved the cooperative nature, which it had assumed in 1917 on the reopening of the playhouse, gutted by the 1914 fire. For two months the members met daily in the original home of Balieff's *Letutchaya Muish* as guests of the management, to formulate protests and to keep in trim through rehearsal. Assigned finally to the cold, humid and unequipped Zon Theatre, the majority of the elder members of the company soon found themselves out of harmony with the radical ideas of the new *régisseur,* Meyerhold, were discharged by him and added to the city's starving unemployed.

Even in the companies where there was no conflict over the repertory, the actor faced, and still faces, almost superhuman obstacles to obtaining the minimum of food necessary for sustenance. Monthly salaries, both governmental and private, have been insufficient to pay for a week's or, at times, even a day's living.

Traveling groups, therefore, were organized to play in the factories and military caserns in and near Moscow, where the artists received their pay "in kind" — flour, sugar, meat, etc. Even a group from the Moscow Art Theatre was thus routed through the outlying districts of the city.

Two other means have been devised to meet the emergency since the Soviet washed its hands of further responsibility for the welfare of the artists. One has been the founding of midnight cabarets by the different companies, in which fabulous prices are charged for refreshments, for chances in lotteries and for the privilege of watching celebrated artists off their dignity. Even the Small State Theatre and its head, Prince Sumbatoff, have yielded to this humiliating expedient.

Another device, called "*Haltoora,*" is that by which an actor is enabled to play two and three, and sometimes even more, rôles in as many theatres in a single evening, thus adding substantially to his income, but substracting as substantially from the effectiveness of his work. Not only badly paid beginners, but the most celebrated players and singers, have been driven to this subterfuge, and a duped public often wonders why a famous artist, announced on the hoardings and in the program, plays so badly in the first two acts and so superbly in the final scenes.

Two questions concerned with the period of governmental control of the theatres will probably never be fully answered. First of all, how sincere was the

ideal toward a better theatre, referred to a few pages back by my friend Yarovoff, and how nearly possible was its attainment if conditions had been favorable? And in the second place, how much has the Russian theatre been retarded by this major operation on its living sentient body?

I am not so sure as Yarovoff seems to be that history will grant to the Soviet's theatrical policy any higher place than to our own numerous well-meaning but futile attempts to "reform" the stage which have become the butt of the newspaper paragraphers, and even of such plays as "The Torchbearers." The final rating may not even be so high when the deeply sinister influences of any kind of propaganda in art are fully appreciated. Perhaps the days of austere paternalism were to be preferred to the orgy of materialism which has ensued, but perhaps, too, the orgy is the logical reaction from what went before and perhaps it would never have developed, if the theatres had been permitted to go their way without interference.

In any case, the trivial aspects of the contemporary Russian theatre will pass. They are not the normal expression of the Russian creative and receptive emotions. Meanwhile — *plus ça change* — the Moscow Art Theatre and the Kamerny Theatre hew persistently to their established lines and carry their audiences along with them.

The same debatable situation exists with reference to the retardation of the impetus of the modern Russian theatre as a result of this ulterior attempt to control its

current. I have no doubt in my own mind that the impetus has been retarded, just as any natural process is slowed down when the element of self-consciousness is introduced. I see one advantage, and only one, to be gained from the experience of the last four years. And that is that the definiteness and completeness of the failure to draft the theatre into service in a social program will prove for all time the futility of mixing propaganda with art. I haven't much faith, though, that any such proof will be admitted by those who prefer to have it otherwise. They will say, no doubt, that the conditions were not favorable, bide their time and try again.

It is no wonder that out of this chaos, this welter of dislocation, this scene where integrity of purpose can be retained but at a fearful material and spiritual cost, there has arisen a dream of lands beyond the horizon. That dream has not shaped itself all of a sudden, but has been growing imperceptibly through the years, and in it America has gradually appeared as the temporary haven and rallying ground for the dramatic art of Muscovy.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Russian Theatre in America

Beyond the horizon, America. Beyond the horizon for the last two decades, America. Growing more and more distinct with the flight of time. A tantalizing magnet, but coy. For the most part a graveyard of brave pioneer effort. In latter months, though, a repentant host, eager to make up for past incivilities, and by its eagerness the greater lure to still other artistic immigrants.

The nation-wide vogue of Balieff's *Chauve-Souris,* the coming of the Moscow Art Theatre, the association of Morris Gest with both of these ventures, the triumphant return of Shaliapin — these are the capstones of a structure almost twenty years in the building. The contemporary invasion of America by the Russian theatre is so legitimately a chapter of the record of that stage today, that it must be admitted in this survey alongside the narrative of the last four years in the playhouses of Moscow and Petrograd. Moscow, Petrograd, New York. A third home has been found for the Russian theatre.

To understand fully the significance of this invasion, it is helpful to recall not only the Russian artists who have come in person, bringing their dramatic

wares of one kind and another, but also the long roster of efforts by our own theatre to interpret for us many of the outstanding examples of the Russian drama. To the former, I have made numerous random references in the course of this book, but their story must be viewed as a whole to become really eloquent. And while the latter roster of the Russian theatre in America by proxy is more a matter of drama than of the theatre, its rehearsal will, I am sure, contribute to a clearer conception of why we are ready today to deny the barriers of a foreign tongue and accept and appreciate where once we were indifferent and even hostile.

It will suffice, I think, in a résumé of our own efforts at placing the plays of the Russians on our stage, to range them under the dramatists themselves and to ignore for the most part the temporal order of their arrival. The main function after all, which such a catalogue can serve, is to indicate the extent of the impact our intelligence and our sympathies have undergone.

One of the first of the Russian playwrights to be introduced to this country was Count Alexei Tolstoy, whose spectacular historical tragedy, "Tsar Fyodor Ivanovitch," is one of the mainstays of the Moscow Art Theatre repertory. The player towered over the playwright, however, when "The Death of Ivan the Terrible," the predecessor to "Tsar Fyodor" in dramatic trilogy, was set upon the stage of the Knicker-

SERGEI SUDEYKIN'S DESIGN FOR "KATINKA," THE PERT AND PICTURESQUE POLKA OF BALIEFF'S *Chauve-Souris*, DONE IN THE STYLE OF THE MUSIC BOXES CARVED AND DECORATED BY THE MUZHIK

bocker Theatre, New York, in March, 1904, by Richard Mansfield.

The plays of Count Alexei's more famous cousin, but the less able dramatist, Count Lyoff Tolstoy, arrived with us early and remained to serve as stimulus to two of the leaders of the new school of scenic design. Our first stage acquaintance with the great recluse was not properly as dramatist, for "Resurrection," in which Blanche Walsh appeared at the Victoria Theatre, New York, in 1903, and "Anna Karenina," which Virginia Harned produced at the Herald Square Theatre, September 2, 1907, were really only dramatizations of Tolstoy's novels. "Redemption" ("The Living Corpse") tempted Arthur Hopkins and John Barrymore in the fall of 1918, and provided Robert Edmond Jones with one of the finest opportunities for stylized realistic interiors he has ever had. The atmosphere of the play as staged at the Plymouth Theatre, New York, October 3, 1918, was not essentially Russian, but between producer, actor and designer, "Redemption" actually emerged better than Tolstoy himself had builded. No corresponding synthesis was at hand to redeem "The Power of Darkness" at the Theatre Guild, January 19, 1920, although Lee Simonson painted into one scene, the final episode of confession in the barn, the self-sacrificial ecstasy of Tolstoy's *dénouement.*

Dostoievsky also arrived betimes on the scene, at the hands of Richard Mansfield, in the form of an

episodic dramatization of "Crime and Punishment," by Charles Henry Meltzer, called "Rodion the Student," and in a pitifully un-Russian and artificially-acted version of the same novel, which E. H. Sothern successively termed in the course of a season with it in 1907–1908: "The Fool Hath Said in His Heart 'There Is No God,'" "The Fool Hath Said in His Heart," and finally "The Fool Hath Said." Gogol, too, is singly represented by a hearty and flavorous amateur performance of "*Revizor*" at the hands of the Yale University Dramatic Association in 1908, but this great and universally comprehensible comedy of dishonest small town officials awaits real recognition and an opportunity to make a fortune for the producer who understands sufficiently both the Russian and the American points of view.

A single hearing, too, has been the lot of talents as divergent as those of Maxim Gorky, Zinaida Hippius and Nikolai Yevreynoff. Gorky, long familiar in the German and Yiddish repertories, finally broke into English acquaintance with "The Lower Depths" ("Night Lodging") when Arthur Hopkins gave it an intelligent, if not greatly illuminating, production at a series of matinees beginning December 22, 1919, and for a few evenings in April, 1920. "The Green Ring," by Zinaida Hippius, wife of Merezhovsky, the novelist-playwright, found, at the Neighborhood Playhouse in the spring of 1922, use as a studio piece for young players, similar to that which had commend it to Stanislavsky for the Second Studio of the Mos-

cow Art Theatre; but in New York it received inferior treatment on the part of the elder members of the cast and won a much smaller following. Yevreynoff, too, is to us a dramatist of a single play — "Gay Death," produced under title of "The Merry Death" by the Washington Square Players at the Comedy Theatre, October 2, 1916, with complete misunderstanding of its technical idiosyncrasies as monodrama.

Tchehoff and Andreieff remain with several productions to their credit. Both playwrights, therefore, are presumably better known in America than their fellows, but in reality we are probably less acquainted with them than with Gorky and the Tolstoys, partly through a misrepresentative choice of plays and partly through misinterpretation of those chosen. Tchehoff, it is true, has been disclosed in both of his moods — as lusty and gusty *farceur* in "The Bear" and "The Marriage Proposal" and as contemplative realist in the episode of "The Swan Song" and the full length of "The Sea Gull." Both the Washington Square Players and the Toy Theatre of Boston produced "The Bear" with insufficient abandon and unction. Russian farce should be keyed at an exaggerated pitch, and played for all it is worth. The Neighborhood Playhouse did "The Marriage Proposal" April 23, 1916. The Toy Theatre, too, did "The Swan Song" and the Washington Square Players stumbled through a hasty and ill-prepared production of "The Sea Gull" at the Bandbox Theatre, May 31, 1916. If any play in

the entire modern Russian canon demands the familiarity that breeds control, it is this tenuous, sensitive and fragile panorama of life among the *intelligentsia* and the landed proprietors in the depressing days of Tsar Nicholas, prior to the upflaring of the 1905 Revolution. Fifteen months' rehearsal were given to it at the Moscow Art Theatre; twice fifteen days at the most at the Bandbox, and the results were commensurate.

With a happy exception or two, Andreieff has been even more misrepresented and misinterpreted. His trifles, "The Beautiful Sabine Women," produced by Samuel A. Eliot, Jr., at the Indianapolis Little Theatre in January, 1916, and by the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York in the spring of 1920, and "Love of One's Neighbor," an early effort of the Washington Square Players, have both been emphasized far beyond their relative importance.

What we have missed most utterly and almost without exception in the plays of Andreieff is his sardonic challenge, not only to society and civilization, but to life itself. The great dramas like "Anathema," and even the well-built and theatrically effective stage-plays of his earlier period, such as "The Days of Our Life," with its terrifying realism, have been too uncompromising and too relentless for American tastes, but their time, I am confident, is coming. When we do choose a play of Andreieff's with this challenge at the heart of it, we comfortably ignore it and gloss it over with scenic sweetmeats. Thus with the bitterness and disillusion of "The Life of Man," which

From Theatre Arts Magazine

ROBERT EDMOND JONES' DESIGN FOR THE SCENE AT THE GYPSIES' HOUSE IN ARTHUR HOPKINS' PRODUCTION OF COUNT LYOFF TOLSTOY'S "REDEMPTION" ("THE LIVING CORPSE")

Bruguière, New York; from Theatre Arts Magazine

THE FINAL SCENE IN THE THEATRE GUILD'S PRODUCTION OF COUNT LYOFF TOLSTOY'S "THE POWER OF DARKNESS," FROM DESIGN BY LEE SIMONSON

emerged under the naïve treatment of the Washington Square Players at the Bandbox Theatre, January 14, 1916, as a kind of Russian "Pilgrim's Progress." Thus, too, in even greater, less excusable and more disastrous degree, with "He Who Gets Slapped," the Theatre Guild's latest attempt to win a Russian reputation, produced January 9, 1922. The Guild has grown up since its days at the Bandbox, and it ought to know better. Besides, there is less left of the shadowy and uncertain values of "He," at its best only second-rate Andreieff, than there was of the sturdier "Life of Man," when the Guild finishes its process of turning an ironic and half-realistic, half-symbolic sketch of the bare and tawdry life beneath the gilt of the circus into a sentimental and melodramatic romance of the gilt which Andreieff expressly scorns. After all, it is only in "Savva," produced by the Beechwood Players in the Vanderlip Theatre at Scarborough, New York, and brought into the metropolis for a single performance, June 25, 1922, that the full, ringing challenge of Andreieff has been heard undisguised and unfettered in our theatre.

Until Andreieff's "Savva" and "Anathema" are produced in our professional theatre as carefully and as brilliantly, at least, as was Tolstoy's "Redemption," until we are enabled to know in English in like thorough manner, Gogol's "*Revizor,*" Gorky's "The Lower Depths" and "Smug Citizens," and Tchehoff's "The Sea Gull," "Uncle Vanya," "The Three Sisters" and "The Cherry Orchard," we can not say that

we have more than a hailing acquaintance with the modern Russian drama and the theatre that houses it.

Nevertheless, as the foregoing record indicates, we do have a hailing acquaintance and apparently a cordial and receptive attitude which stands as a bid for greater intimacy. That greater intimacy, that more perfect understanding and sympathy which should be, and undoubtedly will be, the mutual goal of the Russian and the American theatres, may take one of two forms and in the end will probably assume both. One is the extension of our contact with the masterpieces of the Russian drama in translation into our own tongue. The other is the broadening of our direct contact with the outstanding forces, institutions and personalities of the Russian theatre itself. Conceivably, the one form of contact could exist without the other, but in the natural course of events they are both likely to develop side by side and serve as stimulus, one to the other. Consequently, we may expect the widening stream of Russian drama in English to whet the appetite for richer and more frequent first hand relationships, just as the influx of players, directors and entire companies from the stages of Moscow and Petrograd will expand the potential field of the translated play.

An examination of the record of the Russian theatre in America in person, in connection with the foregoing record of its activities among us by proxy, will bear out fully this supposition. Weak and hesitant in their early courses, the two currents have fed one

another and have grown side by side. The coming of the Diagileff Russian Ballet in 1916 is almost contemporaneous with the development of the new curiosity in the translated Russian drama. The latest wave in the Russian invasion, comprising Balieff, Shaliapin and the Moscow Art Theatre, has its parallel in a Russianized Broadway, with producers combing the shelves for Russian plays sufficiently universal in subject and treatment to survive the process of translation or adaptation.

I have gone into this detail in regard to Russian drama in English on the American stage, not because it is a vital factor in the chronicle of the contemporary Russian theatre, but because it serves as background and as parallel and helps us to understand the fortunes of the Russian stage in American transplantation — a legitimate thread of our chronicle which has grown from insignificance to a position of unmistakable dominance. Up until four years ago, the Russian invasion of the American stage was a casual, occasional and almost accidental affair. Today, it is the expression of a dream universally cherished in the Russian capitals, a dream which practical circumstances alone prevent nine artists out of ten from realizing. It is important, therefore, to trace this movement from its sources down to the present time, and, unlike its parallel current which could be considered in the large, to trace it with chronological accuracy.

The vanguard of the Russian dramatic invasion in person rather than by proxy arrived in 1905. It con-

sisted of a small company headed by the itinerant actor-manager, Pavel Orlienieff, and it included as its most talented member, aside from Orlienieff, his pupil and *protégé,* Alla Nazimova. The newspapers and periodicals which deigned to notice these curious vagabonds, who had the courage or foolhardiness to set before us unpopular plays in the most difficult of foreign tongues, had a tortuous time with their names, compromising on Orlenoff for that of the manager and experimenting with Nazimoff and Nesimoff before settling accurately on Nazimova for that of the pupil. The visitors had an even more tortuous time of it, for, although they won instant critical attention and praise for their interpretation of Ibsen and their Russian repertory at the Criterion Theatre, New York, they soon got into booking and financial difficulties.

Orlienieff returned to Russia, disheartened. But his pupil remained, under persuasion, to learn English and appear on Broadway. Surprising even her most ardent admirers, Nazimova mastered our strange tongue in the space of six months and appeared under the management of Henry Miller at the Princess Theatre in November, 1906, in "Hedda Gabler," following it with other Ibsen items from her Russian repertory and beginning the career which has kept her on our stage ever since.

Orlienieff and his band had probably been pushed out of Russia by the difficult conditions of living which followed the 1905 Revolution — the same force which sent the Moscow Art Theatre to Germany, Aus-

tria and Poland on the only foreign tour this stay-at-home company has ever made prior to its coming to America.

The next dramatic ambassador to come in person was an admitted fugitive from that Revolution and the black reaction which trailed it. He was Maxim Gorky, already famed internationally as novelist and playwright. His "Smug Citizens" and "The Lower Depths" had been produced by the Moscow Art Theatre during the season of 1902-1903. His "Children of the Sun" had just reached the same stage in the fall of 1905. "The Lower Depths," especially, had achieved world fame through its production by Max Reinhardt in Berlin in 1905, under title of "*Nachtasyl*" or "Night Lodging." To America, however, he brought with him Mme. Andreievna, not yet his wife, and his fame was as nothing to the hotel where he attempted to register. Rudely ejected on the street — fame, bag and baggage — he finally found a lodging place, but the tone of the publicity he had received was not conducive to artistic creation, and he soon departed for Europe and the hospitality of Capri.

For several years, no other Russian artist of the theatre dared to encounter rebuff in America. Then, in 1908, two more of them came, both of whom received the traditionally cold reception. Of the two, the great Russian basso, Fyodor Shaliapin, was the most inexplicable failure. An alien tongue is no barrier to grand opera. For years he had been the hero

of the lyric stages of St. Petersburg and Italy, although his stupendous western European triumphs in Paris and London were still to come. In 1908, the Metropolitan Opera House in New York engaged him briefly — and disastrously. Those were stricter and more provincial days. His Don Basilio in "The Barber of Seville" was unconventional. And therefore anathema. Before he had an opportunity to sing a single note of his Russian repertory, he was laughed off the stage and began an absence of thirteen years which lasted until November, 1921.

Equally disastrous was the visit of the eminent Russo-Polish actress, Vera Kommissarzhevskaya, in her time the reigning favorite of the stages of St. Petersburg and Moscow. Her failure was more easily explicable than that of Shaliapin. for our dramatic stage with its still provincial horizon suspected a foreign language, no matter how brilliantly it was used, unless its bearer had the reputation of a Bernhardt or a Duse. Mme. Kommissarzhevskaya came unheralded, unexplained, unknown except to her countrymen on the East Side.

Arriving in New York in 1908, she opened her season at Daly's Theatre, presenting an international repertory in Russian, including Ibsen's "A Doll's House," Gorky's "Children of the Sun," Ostrovsky's "The Girl Without a Dowry," Sudermann's "The Fires of St. John" and "The Battle of the Butterflies" and Molière's "*Le Misanthrope.*" Critically acclaimed but publicly neglected, she soon transferred her

repertory to the old Thalia Theatre in the Bowery. She lingered there awhile, playing to her own people, but finally gave up and returned to Russia. As I have already indicated in the introduction to Chapter XII, she mistook American heedlessness for a deliberate desire to slight her. Her feelings were deeply wounded, and her catastrophe here undoubtedly hastened her decline and death in 1910.

Two years passed before the next wave of the Russian invasion broke on our shores, and on it there rode into immediate favor Anna Pavlova and Mihail Mordkin. The tide had turned and these two magicians of the art of the dance had performed the miracle. Through them and a small ensemble, America had its first taste of the exotic loveliness and imaginative virility of the Russian Ballet. Invited to the Metropolitan Opera House, at the suggestion of Otto H. Kahn in the early months of 1910, after their gala engagements in Western Europe, they followed their triumph in New York with a whirlwind tour of the country. At last, though, jealousy crept in and parted the two foremost dancers of their generation, who, in the opinion of many, should still be working together instead of wasting their great gifts on inferior partners.

Up to this time, however, the flaming colors of the Ballet Russe and their accompanying vivid choreographic ensemble were hidden secrets to us. Pavlova and Mordkin had brought drab backgrounds and scant support. It remained for Morris Gest to import in 1911 the vanguard of the real Russian Ballet — the

brilliant settings and costumes of Leon Bakst and a company of dancers, including Lydia Lopokova, Mlle. Baldina, Fyodor and Alexei Kosloff, Alexei Bulgakoff, Alexander Volinin, Ivan Tarasoff and Nikolai Zvereff, all grouped around Gertrude Hoffman.

This "*Saison Russe*" was Gest's first venture in introducing the art of his native country to the public of the land of his adoption. A runaway from his home in Vilna at the age of nine, he had landed in Boston in 1893, and had fought his way up through newsboy gangs and theatre box offices to the threshold of a career as a producing manager. His experience with the Russian Ballet was disastrous financially, and for the better part of a decade he laid aside his dreams of becoming dramatic ambassador extraordinary from the Russian stage to the American, and devoted his efforts to building up a reputation for making costly spectacular productions of his own. The record of this early venture remained untouched, however, for five years until the Diagileff Russian Ballet arrived.

The years just prior to and succeeding the outbreak of the war saw a gap in the Russian invasion, which was closed only with the advent of the luxurious, populous and prohibitively costly Diagileff Ballet early in 1916. Hardly any succeeding year has failed to add its quota to the ranks of immigrant Russian artists of the theatre, many of whom have settled down to live and work with us.

The Diagileff Ballet, born, as I have told in Chapter VII, of the free spirits of Russian choreographic,

scenic and musical art in self-imposed exile in Western Europe, had been the sensation of Paris and London for several seasons. In the natural course of international artistic exchange, it would undoubtedly have come sooner or later to American shores. The pressure of the war on the French and British capitals added to the ambitious and perspicacious generosity of Otto H. Kahn, as the man in the shadow of the Metropolitan Opera finances and the faithful Maecenas of Russian art in America, undoubtedly hastened an inevitable event.

Heralded in newspaper and periodical like no foreign dramatic visitor theretofore, the Diagileff Ballet opened its first American season at the Century Theatre under Metropolitan Opera auspices, late in January, 1916. Adolph Bolm, Leonid Miassin and Lydia Lopokova headed an enormous company of dancers and mimes. The repertory included "Petrushka," the peak of the Ballet's genius; "The Fire Bird"; "Tamar"; "The Afternoon of a Faun"; "Sheherazade"; "Prince Igor"; "Cleopatra"; *"Soleil de Nuit"; "Carnaval,"* and a number of shorter pieces. In addition to the canvases of Bakst, the settings disclosed work by Alexander Benois and Alexander Golovin. After a month at the Century, an extensive and grandiose tour carried the ballet westward and then back to the Metropolitan for an additional engagement in April. Efforts to obtain the release of Nizhinsky from an Austrian prison camp were successful by the opening of the next season, and with

this eerie genius of the dance at its head, the company appeared again in New York and again toured the country, adding to its repertory Strauss's *"Til Eulenspiegel,"* with a gorgeously mad setting from the brush of the foremost American designer for the theatre, Robert Edmond Jones.

With all its unprecedented *réclame* and an eager public interest wherever it went, the Diagileff Ballet rolled up a colossal deficit on its two seasons in this country, costing Otto Kahn's generous purse a sum upwards of half a million dollars. To explain this material failure in the face of artistic triumph, several reasons may be cited. In the first place, there was dubious wisdom in announcing Tamara Karsavina, who never came, and Nizhinsky, who joined the company only with its second season. The plan of operation, too, was conceived on an unnecessarily and disastrously extravagant scale. Crowded houses every night would have failed to meet the weekly budget. It is possible, in the third place, that the Diagileff Ballet came to us prematurely, before our esthetic horizon was sufficiently expanded by contact with a world-wide theatre renascent and the phenomenal development of our own stage arts in recent seasons. Still, someone probably would have had to pay the price of the pioneer and the pathfinder. As value received for the loss they sustained, the Diagileff Ballet and its American sponsor have the satisfaction of realizing that their efforts have served as spur and guarantee, not only to the Russians who have traveled with ease the path they

broke, but also to numerous native experimenters, besides leaving Adolph Bolm behind as permanent residuum to stage Rimsky-Korsakoff's "*Coq d'Or*" for the Metropolitan Opera House from a score obtained by Morris Gest, to put on and perform in "The Birthday of the Infanta" for the Chicago Opera, to found his own Ballet Intime and latterly to become director of the ballet for the Chicago Opera.

The year 1916 also brought two Russian dramatic talents which by strange mischance have thus far missed positive registry on their own account, or acclimatization to our peculiar conditions, although they remain with us in hopeful pursuit of their ambitions. One is Ossip Dymow, playwright, whose "Nju," brought from Russia, failed decisively and whose "Bronx Express," written after contact with our life, had only a short run on Broadway after a fairly successful production at the Jewish Art Theatre. The other is Vadim Uraneff, pupil of Meyerhold and convert to that *régisseur's* theory of the theatre theatrical. Emerging publicly only at long intervals, as in the prologue to Andreieff's "Anathema" at a special performance at the Apollo Theatre, New York, in February, 1921, Uraneff has nursed nearer and nearer to realization his dream of an American *commedia dell' arte* to be called "The Theatre" and concerned with producing "frankly theatric and non-representational plays," such as "The Little Show Booth" ("*Balagantchik*") and "The Star" ("*Nyeznakomka*" or "*The Unknown Woman*") by Alexander Blok.

Heretofore, no Russian scenic designer of the first rank had sought America in person and equipped with a full display of his canvases. In flight from the disruptive forces of revolution, Boris Anisfeld, fortified by stage association with Meyerhold, corrected this lapse by bringing himself and a representative array of his work in 1918. Numerous exhibitions of his colorful studies followed in the next few seasons, and he settled down to live and work among us. His most important theatrical commissions have been: "The Love of Three Oranges" for the Chicago Opera Company and "*La Reine Fiamette*," Boïto's "*Mefistofele*," and "*Snyegurotchka*" for the Metropolitan Opera House.

Once more in the ensuing season, 1919, Morris Gest stepped forward to serve as living link between the stages of his native and adopted countries by inducing Michel Fokine, first and greatest of the directors of the modern Russian Ballet and the genius underlying Diagileff's early fame, to come to America to devise and rehearse the ballet in Gest's spectacular production of "Aphrodite." Fokine remained to do the ballet in "Mecca," too, for Gest, and like many of his compatriot artists, he has become an American fixture.

Two divergent talents were the quota of 1920—one yielding to the same persuasions that brought Anisfeld from Petrograd two years earlier and the other rising to notice from a long novitiate in the byways of our own Yiddish theatres. Professor

Nicolas Roerich, foremost living Russian painter and supreme interpreter of the mysticism of the Great White North and the legends of old Muscovy, came by way of a year in London, and like Anisfeld, Bolm and Fokine, he, too, has made himself thoroughly one of us. His active entry into our theatre has progressed slowly in comparison with his extended practice in that field at home and in western Europe. Among his most important commissions in Moscow, Petrograd, Paris and London were: "The Three Wise Men" at Yevreynoff's *Starinny* or Old Theatre in Petrograd in 1907; "*Snyegurotchka*" for the *Opéra Comique* in Paris in 1908; "Prince Igor," "The Maid of Pskoff" and "*Sacré du Printemps*" for Diagileff between 1909 and 1913; "Peter Gynt" for the Moscow Art Theatre in 1911–1912; "Tristan and Isolde" for the Theatre Zimina in Moscow in 1912; "The Princess Maleine" for the *Svobodny* or Free Theatre in Moscow in 1913–1914 and several operas for Sir Thomas Beecham in London after the war, unproduced because of that impresario's bankruptcy. Thus far, his only executed commission in this country has been "*Snyegurotchka*" for the Chicago Opera Company, a production which still awaits public disclosure to stand as rival for Anisfeld's settings for the same opera at the Metropolitan.

Commanding attention in the spring of the same year at the Jewish Art Theatre, after a six-year struggle upward through the Yiddish stages of the Bowery and Second Avenue, Jacob Ben-Ami passed adventur-

ously to the English speaking stage that autumn under the direction of Arthur Hopkins. Product of the provincial theatres of Minsk and Odessa, Ben-Ami proved at the old Garden Theatre that he possessed the fire, the passion, the imagination of the modern Russian stage, the ability to sink personality in characterization, and yet to retain the driving power and the contagious charm of personality. His first undertaking in the new tongue was a play from the Danish which he had brought in manuscript and played in Yiddish, Sven Lange's " Samson and Delilah." In it he convinced all the irreconcilables that he had a contribution to make to our growing stage, a contribution unmistakably Russian rather than Jewish. A season's comparative hiatus caused by the failure in English of " The Idle Inn," one of his Yiddish *pièces de résistance* by Peretz Hirshbein, a playwright immigrant from Russia known chiefly in Yiddish circles, has further chastened an artist whose youthful vitality and imagination will carry him far.

The first decisive intimation that the tide, which had begun to turn with the coming of Diagileff but not promptly enough to save the ballet from disaster, was now running strongly in favor of the Russian theatre in America, came in November, 1921, with the return of Fyodor Ivanovitch Shaliapin. The great operatic basso, heroic in stature, in creative imagination and in his sway over the affections of the Russian public, had been stung by our cavalier rejection of his art in

1908. Thirteen years had passed. He had become the furore of Paris and London by 1914, and the virtual prisoner of his native stages after the outbreak of war and through the Revolution which developed from it.

Frequent rumors of calamity followed by frequent rumors of escape, were finally set at rest by his arrival in New York in November, 1921, a little greyer, but just as upstanding physically and artistically as he had been in that ominously quiet June of 1914, when phlegmatic Londoners stood all night in queue to buy seats for Covent Garden as often as he was announced in "Boris Godunoff," "Prince Igor," or *"Hovantchina."* Restored to our public by way of the concert stage, he found at once that something had happened in the interval to broaden our esthetic horizon. In repayment for the storm of his welcome he agreed to sing "Boris" twice at the Metropolitan. At de luxe prices, the huge house was sold out days in advance for both engagements. One by one was added until the total reached seven — all in the same opera and all requiring the police reserves to handle the crowds that tried to force their way in. One thing was assured. And that was that neither thirteen years nor thirteen months would pass before he should be heard again and in a more extended repertory.

And another thing was made a little more certain. At least, I suspect that the inseparable intimacy which grew up between the great basso and Russia's dra-

matic ambassador to our stage, was one of the stimulants that induced Morris Gest to decide to bring Nikita Balieff and his *Chauve-Souris* to America. Gest, it is true, had had *pourparlers* with Balieff in Paris in June 1921. As Alexander Woollcott analyzed the case in the *New York Times:* "Morris Gest saw the *Chauve-Souris* a dozen times in Paris, and then, having been called back to this workaday country on business, invited the whole troupe to follow him, probably for no shrewder reason than that he could not face the intolerable prospect of not seeing it fifty times more." Two hundred and fifty times more, three hundred, five hundred — as the case turns out.

No contracts, however, had been signed in Paris. Other managers took turns presumptuously announcing Balieff and his band from The Bat of Moscow. Finally, with his Russian blood, imagination and ambition stirred by association with Shaliapin, Gest resorted to the cable, resumed negotiations and concluded contracts which brought Balieff and his entire compact staff and company to New York late in January, 1922.

Balieff had had a checkered career from the time I had bade him farewell in his cozy cellar in Moscow in March, 1918. For some time he had continued his gay and colorful programs and his witty and fearless verbal heckling of those in political power and out. For the latter indulgence, non-partisan as it was, the Soviet heckled him in return and with interest added. He gave up at last, traveled south, made his way out

NICOLAS REMISOFF'S DESIGN FOR "THE SUDDEN DEATH OF A HORSE, OR THE GREATNESS OF THE RUSSIAN SOUL." A WHIMSICAL FARCE BY ANTON TCHEHOFF IN THE REPERTORY OF BALIEFF'S *Chauve-Souris*

by stages through Constantinople and reached Paris without friends,funds or future.

Friends he soon found and others joined him from the forty-four corners of Europe. Fellow exiles in the French capital, he discovered, were Sergei Sudeykin and Nicolas Remisoff. Sudeykin, who has appeared frequently in these pages as scenic designer for Meyerhold and the Kamerny Theatre, is also one of the most virile, original and fecund of Russia's younger easel artists. He, too, had fled Moscow by southerly route, painting his way through Stamboul to Paris. Remisoff, the Re-Mi of the Petrograd comic weekly, *Novy Satirikon,* had won a sturdy reputation as a caricaturist, and, together with Sudeykin, he agreed to provide Balieff with new scenic equipment. Many of his cartoons had already served Balieff as stimulus for acts on the stage of *Letutchaya Muish.* The nucleus of The Bat's original company answered summons in the persons of Mmes. Deykarhanova and Fechner. Forterre, on Paris leave from the Kamerny, was enlisted as composer. Mme. Karabanova, also of the Kamerny; Wavitch and Dalmatoff, of Russian light operatic stages; Kotchetovsky, of the ballet; and numerous others were recruited. And in December, 1920, with some fear but with greater determination, Balieff revived *Letutchaya Muish* at the Théâtre Fémina under the French title for The Bat, *La Chauve-Souris.* Five productions followed in succession from December to August, before the company was taken for a fortnight to San Sebas-

tian, Spain, and thence to a British fall and winter season in the Pavilion, Apollo and Coliseum Theatres, London, and the Manchester Hippodrome.

It was in Paris, as I have said, that Morris Gest got his first taste of the antic founder of the *Chauve-Souris.* Under that title he decided to bring The Bat of Moscow to New York to avoid titular confusion with a certain melodramatic best-seller of Broadway. And on the night of February 3, 1922, at the Forty-Ninth Street Theatre, just four days after landing, Balieff roused a super-critical private audience to cheers. Public audiences immediately returned the same verdict; an eight weeks' engagement, rather timidly announced for five, ran into 153 performances of the first bill at the original theatre; and on June 5 these Russians, who had so decisively dispelled the notion that their nation never laughed, moved to the Century Roof (remade throughout in vivid Russian guise), disclosed their second bill in deference to the restless and tireless Balieff, though the first could have continued indefinitely, and settled down into an American fixture.

The clientele commanded by Balieff's *Chauve-Souris* from the start has consisted in part, of course, of those American connoisseurs and The Bat's own fellow-countrymen who were predisposed in its favor. It soon deployed, however, into the walks of the general, the casual and the accidental theatregoer in response to a newspaper and magazine welcome unprecedented in our time and reaching from coast to coast. To this

MORRIS GEST, DRAMATIC AMBASSADOR FROM THE RUSSIAN THEATRE TO THE AMERICAN, AND HIS FRIEND, FYODOR IVANOVITCH SHALIAPIN, RUSSIA'S AND THE WORLD'S GREATEST OPERA SINGER

Photograph by International

OTTO H. KAHN

MAECENAS OF THE RUSSIAN THEATRE IN AMERICA

phenomenal *dénouement* of an apparently risky venture three factors contributed; the sound and inimitable worth of Nikita Balieff as practicing and executive artist of the theatre; the shrewd technique which Morris Gest used to introduce him to his public; and — miracle.

This element of miracle, most fascinating of the forces at work in the theatre, seems to have put in its appearance almost intentionally at a time when the usual economic and political impulses which reconcile nations had failed to heal the estrangement between Russia and America, and in lieu of these commoner impulses to have volunteered the placative and universal power of art. What the American Relief Administration has done in efficient first aid to humanize the Russian conception of America, Balieff's *Chauve-Souris* in its modest way has done to humanize our conception of Russia. It was appropriate, therefore, that these two mutual interpreters of two great peoples to one another should combine, as they did last spring, to collect and send American funds in the form of food drafts to the starving artists of the theatres of Moscow, Petrograd and Odessa, and that Morris Gest as dramatic ambassador between the two countries should have been instrumental with Balieff in arranging this token of brotherhood.

In the trail of Balieff's *Chauve-Souris* have come various Russians of varying talents. The Russian Grand Opera Company, consisting of stranded artists from scattered lyric stages, arrived by way of the Ori-

ent and the Pacific coast in late spring, 1922. Fyodor Kommissarzhevsky has been summoned as stage director by the Theatre Guild. Mme. Kuznetsova, one of a dozen palpable imitators of Balieff now extant in Europe, has brought to us her Russian Revue. The influence of this intimate and eager little playhouse of the bulbous Balieff, enlisting spectators as participants in the proceedings, has extended, too, throughout our own lighter stage. Hardly a revue along Broadway would be just as it is if Balieff had not come our way, and the Forty-Niners, under the direction of George Tyler, George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly, is a frankly admitted application of the idea of the *Chauve-Souris* to American material.

Chief outgrowth of Balieff's sojourn among us, however, is the coming of the Moscow Art Theatre, likewise under the direction of Morris Gest. It is fitting that it should be he who brings to us for the first time, the world's first theatre. By birth, imagination and ambition he is equipped to crusade for it, as foreign works of great truth and beauty must be championed and heralded until we are familiar with them. And by his training in our theatre he knows the situation he must meet to achieve these results.

It is necessary only to turn back to page 196 to understand why the Art Theatre's visit to America is inextricably interwoven with the success of Balieff's *Chauve-Souris*. Balieff began under Stanislavsky and Nyemirovitch-Dantchenko. His first collaborators at The Bat were fellow-artists from that stage. When

he severed his connection with the Moscow Art Theatre in 1912 to devote all his time to his own enterprise, he carried with him the best wishes of his former co-workers.

As soon as his position here was assured, therefore, Balieff, consciously or unwittingly, began talking to his American sponsor about this unique stage where he had learned his craft. Simultaneously, the Kremlin city was hearing about the triumph of its madcap clown. Why not the Moscow Art Theatre? thought Gest. Why not America? thought the Art Theatre. Cables were tapped in both directions. Gest considered going to Moscow to negotiate, but Balieff held him. Instead, therefore, Nikolai Rumiantseff, business manager of the Moscow Art Theatre, came to New York, spent a month and a fortune in further cables and finally returned with a proposition to be ratified by the entire cooperative body of the theatre. Balieff, as trusted liaison officer, had vouched for his sponsor to the Art Theatre and for his preceptors to Gest. Shaliapin, too, back in Moscow, put in a word for his friend. The terms were accepted at once and the company set out in September, 1922, to open a preliminary European tour in Berlin.

There is no need to repeat here the story of the Moscow Art Theatre, so fully developed in Chapters II to VI. From that chronicle, it should be fairly evident what its coming to us may mean to our theatre. Apart from its passing intrinsic interest, a matter of no mean moment, it should provide our realists

and would-be realists a needed lesson in what may be found beneath the wrappings of life, if we have the vision to see and the mastery of our powers of expression to make others see. It should provide, too, a spur and a stimulus to our opponents of realism and help to clarify their vague and groping efforts to point and perfect their revolutionary theories, technique and practice. That, perhaps, is one of the most valuable functions which the Moscow Art Theatre has fulfilled on the modern Russian stage.

It is not likely that we shall at once find ourselves in possession of as definite and clearly contrasted a body of dramatic theory, as that which in the Russian capital has been able to ride all the storms of revolution, but we may, before we realize it, find ourselves appreciably on the way toward that enviable goal. And if we do, the discovery of a third home for the Russian theatre in the new world will not have been in vain.

CHAPTER XIX

The Spirit of the Russian Theatre

A hive of industry. Of industry? No, for that connotes commerce — buying and selling. A hive of artistic activity. Artistic — activity. No pretentiousness here. No preening before mirrors. No idle talk, movements, leagues, lectures. No uplift, no censorship. No issue of morality, immorality. Just produce, produce, produce! You have dreamed? What is your dream? Is it true? Is it beautiful? Does it illumine the dim backwaters of life? Does it pierce the fog that clouds the path ahead? Show us your dream. Now in this way. Now in that. Which means the more? Is there still another way? Find it! Thousands of men, women, children — hungry, cold, dressed in makeshift garments — go questing in obedience to this command. From the depths of their own souls the command has come. And it is not to be denied!

That, in terms at least Yevreynoff would understand, is my impression of the spirit underlying the amazing record of the modern Russian theatre. I can not forego the temptation to set down in conclusion some of the random aspects of that spirit, the things that distinguish it from the guiding impulses of

other contemporary theatres, and particularly those phases which hint at parallel forces in our own theatre — forces still latent with us but stirring.

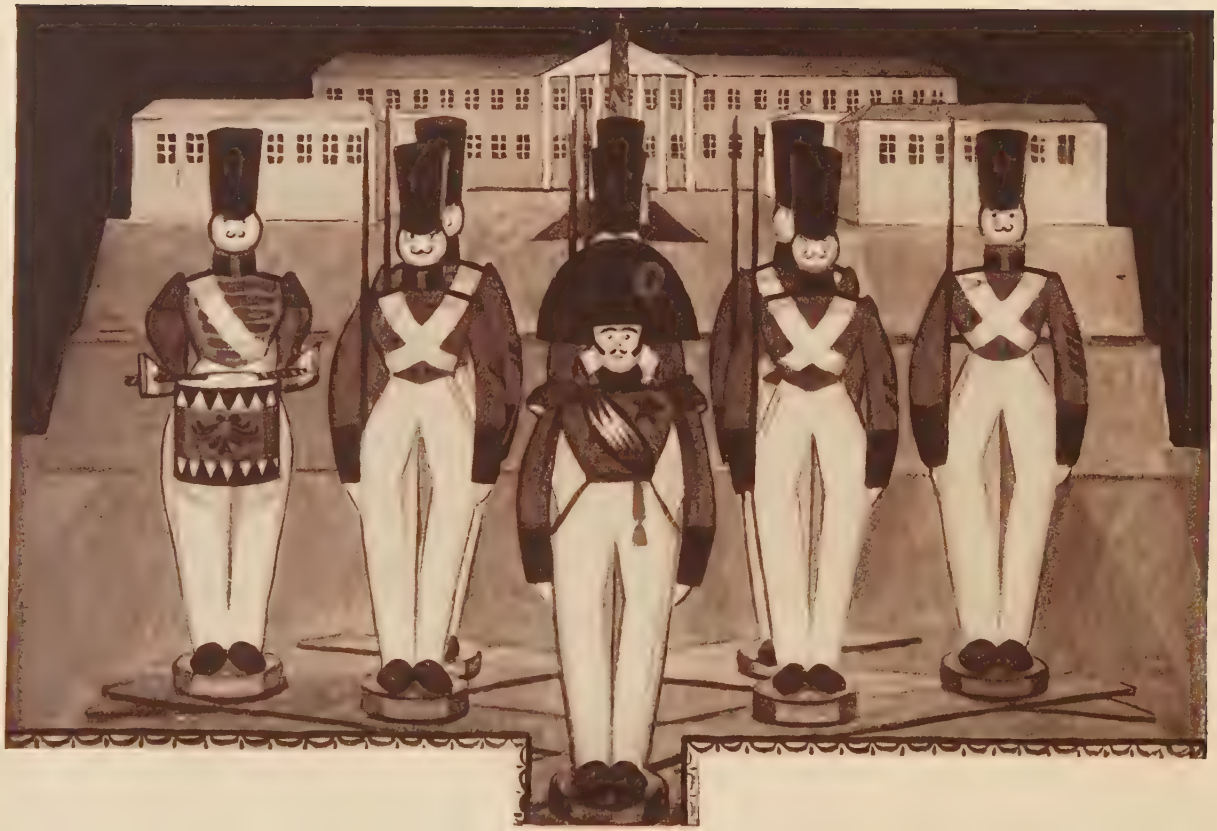
This word "spirit" and the concepts it is called on to denote are often vague enough, in all conscience. And precious, affected. I admit I may be exposing it to further abuse, but I take the risk. With all its indefiniteness, it is the only word that fits. Beneath the diversities and contradictions of this theatre, there is something which all its paradoxical elements possess in common. What is it? Not will — nor intellect — alone. But a force welling up from the inner secret treasuries of man, bursting the bonds of inertia, of tradition, and by aid or in contempt of will, of intellect, seeking, demanding, achieving outlet, expression.

The artistic product of any people is dependent on this imponderable impulse. Often it is compounded with will or intellect, dominated by one or the other. And then, although it bespeaks respect, attention, it is without the glow, the warmth, the eagerness, the enthusiasm, the excitement, the ecstasy which marks the theatre of Russia. In each of the great ages of the theatre in the past, the impulse of the spirit was dominant, unmixed and unconscious in the beginning, yielding little by little to the rival conscious forces up to the peak, and passing under their control as the peak was surmounted and left behind. Athens. Renaissance Italy. Tudor England. Molière's France. De Vega's Spain.

In the measure to which this impulse is still domi-

From Theatre Arts Magazine

SERGEI SUDEYKIN'S DESIGN FOR "THE MOSCOW FIANCES," ONE OF THE FAVORED NUMBERS OF BALIEFF'S *Chauve-Souris*



nant in Russia, the stages of Moscow and Petrograd lead those of the rest of the world today. Elsewhere, self-consciousness and tradition dull the natural flow of the artist's imagination. On the French stage, the conscious control of will and intellect takes the form of imposing an artificial refinement on creative products. In the German theatres, an obsession with mechanism has left scant room for the free play of the imaginative spirit, although there are plentiful signs here of the waning of this influence and the reassertion of imagination. Italy, in the third place, is still bound by its own romantic and lyric traditions and by a borrowed realism, but here, too, there are signs of renascence. England, for the most part, continues to rehearse the realism imported from Scandinavia and the Continent, while the promising rebirth of a theatre with a soul in Ireland has been smothered under civil strife. The Orient, in its turn, is fettered yet to a glorious past — a past which it preserves far more adequately than we do our own. Japan, it is true, is reaching forward with one hand, but until now only in imitation of the dry bones of the West.

And finally, we in America are still in the awkward age, unhampered by tradition, unblessed by a cohesive, effective association of scattered but indubitively creative impulses. Inarticulate yet, but struggling toward clarity of expression and final achievement — that is the confident hope of many which Otto H. Kahn has thus put into words in his monograph, " Some Observations of Art in America ":

" If, as I trust and believe will come to pass, we will give to art that full scope and place and honor to which it is entitled, if we make it widely and easily accessible to the people, if we afford serious encouragement, fostering attention and adequate opportunity to genuine aspirations and talent, and due reward to genuine merit, we shall, I am convinced, astonish the world and ourselves by the greatness and intensity of the manifestation of the American spirit in art."

A backward glance over the supreme achievements of the modern Russian theatre as I have tried to interpret them in the foregoing chapters, will make clear what I mean by the workings of this intangible spirit. In the plays of Tchehoff, Gorky's " The Lower Depths " and " The Blue Bird " at the Moscow Art Theatre, in " Twelfth Night " at the First Studio of that theatre, in " Salome " at the Kamerny, in " The Sorrows of the Spirit " at the Small State Theatre of Moscow, in Meyerhold's " Don Juan," and even in the antic delights of Balieff's *Chauve-Souris,* its presence is unmistakably evident. Through divergent matter and equally divergent and even clashing manner, this thrilling note of eager and boundless creative energy runs. Effects and reactions are present in each of these productions which could not have been put there by the most omniscient and shrewdly calculating intention. Born in a moment of intuitive perception, these specimens of the art which is the theatre are unclouded by self-consciousness, and yet matured and poised in the majority of instances by just sufficient intellectual

guidance. I have watched rehearsals of more than one of these finished products and I have seen everyone connected with them, from producer to doorkeeper, throw himself into the process of creation with the fire and self-abandon of a being possessed. The youth of this régime of the spirit and its logical kinship with the other great eras of artistic renaissance are facts attested by an occasional flare-up of imaginative vitality without any poise or control at all, for the world and all like one of the distorted but eloquent canvases of the early masters.

Accustomed as we are to spontaneous and awkward outbursts of enthusiasm and feeling in our own artistic youth and acquainted with the sense of embarrassment when we have found out what we have done, I believe that we in America, by increasing contact with this theatre of Russia, will feel a responsive chord struck within us and will rally for guidance to these more mature but still fresh and unspoiled preceptors. I can foresee that association with this theatre will help to release our own innate but diffident gifts and give us the confidence we need to overcome the mistaken conviction that art in the theatre is not for us nor the things of the spirit.

And why, after all, should we be shy? We have had our Whitman and our Poe, our Whistler and our Sargent, our St. Gaudens and our William James. Why not our artists of the theatre, nourished by the inner fires of the spirit as were these who have already lit the path of our life by their vision?

Just what forms that spirit will take in our theatre when it becomes articulate, is impossible to predict. Springing from hidden sources, it reveals its secrets in advance to no man. It has been different, individual, in each previous renaissance. Only one thing is certain. And that is that it will come in its own time. For, once more in the words of Kahn, " The call of a people does not remain unanswered."

THE END

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